

Schoolboy
Days
in
France

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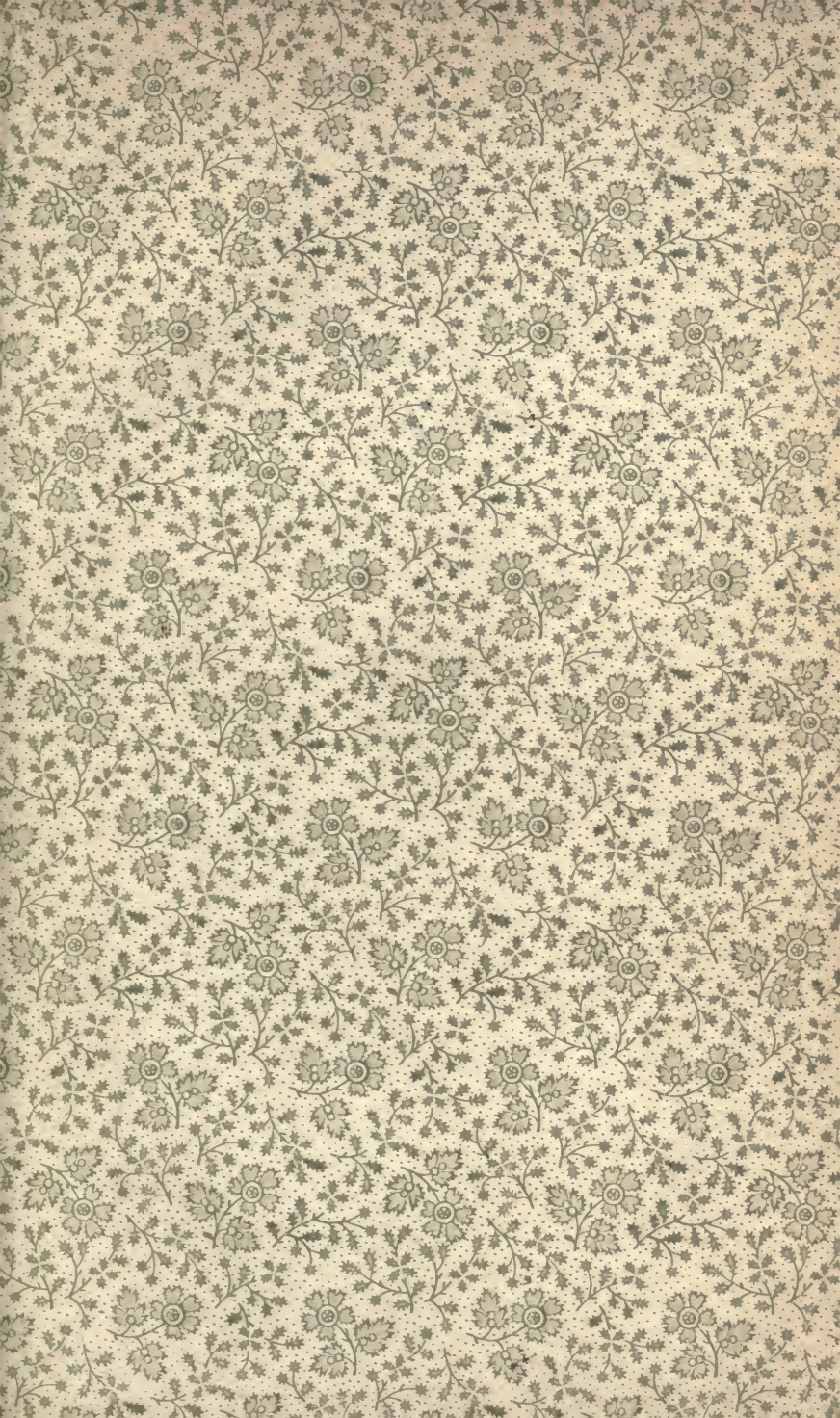
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SCHOOLBOY DAYS IN FRANCE

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“EVERY ARM WAS RAISED.”

SCHOOLBOY DAYS IN FRANCE

BY

ANDRÉ LAURIE

Pascal Girouard

TRANSLATED BY E. P. ROBINS



Illustrated

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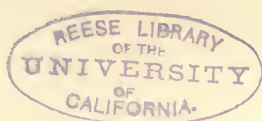
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SCHOOLBOY DAYS IN FRANCE.



CHAPTER I.

BILLANCOURT.

THIS book will serve to give *inchoate* collegians a foretaste of the life that is in store for them as "big boys," in the schoolboy acceptance of the term, and also an idea of the distance that parts an urchin of the sixth form from that important individual, a candidate for an A. B. degree.

Our narrative opens in a salon, furnished with some pretension to elegance, on the first floor of a Parisian villa, standing by itself in the middle of a great lawn and flower beds, on the Quai de Billancourt.

In front and at a distance of a hundred paces the Seine propels its gentle tide under the vessels floating on its

bosom, between two rows of quivering poplars and past the Île Séguin. To the left and somewhat in the rear are three five-story structures, overtopped by a tall chimney from which pour clouds of smoke. Along the tow-path are mountains of pink and white beets, which an endless chain of labourers, treading on one another's heels and walking with measured steps, like a procession of human ants, are loading in basketfuls into the hold of a vessel made fast to the wharf.

Further away may be seen carts with gigantic horses harnessed to them, a train of cars side-tracked on a switch, busy, bustling crews of workmen, white wreaths of steam rising in the air, — all the turmoil and activity of a sugar refinery in full blast.

It is Sunday to-day, and the clocks have just struck eleven. But work goes on without cessation, day and night, at the works at this season of the year. The time lost during the hot months has to be made up, when operations are suspended because the syrup sours.

A cheerful little fire is blazing on the hearth of the salon. We are in October, and although the approaches of winter are as yet scarcely perceptible, mamma's delicate health requires this precaution.

Seated at the corner of the fireplace and with her back to the light, she is reading aloud Jules Verne's last romance for the entertainment of the family, while in the opposite corner grandpa, snugly wrapped in his warm dressing-gown, while pretending to give all his attention to the reading, keeps his eyes fixed on the clock and is evidently deeply interested in the movement of the creeping hands.

It is plain that he is impatiently awaiting the arrival of some one who should be there already, for now you

may see him laboriously extract his great thick repeater from his fob and compare its indications with the clock's.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," he says at last to mamma, "but don't you think Albert should be here by this time."

"Why, it is five minutes past eleven!" mamma replies. "I hope they have n't kept him in, by way of celebrating his admission to the Lycée Montaigne!"

The aspiration has scarce more than left mamma's lips than the door-bell rings and answers her. Three seconds later a great, lanky, long-legged collegian bursts into the room.

"Good morning, mamma! — Good morning, grandpa! I am a little late, — we stopped on the way, you see, papa and I. You shall know all about it presently — Where is Aunt Aubert?"

There is a sound of kisses, a general movement, the book is relegated to the table. Here comes papa with a smile on his face and mamma is relieved of her anxiety.

That great boy to whom so warm a welcome is extended is none other than I, Albert Besnard (your prospective parent), seventeen years old at the present writing, very proud of a budding mustache and some indications of side whiskers, supplemented by a pair of shoulders that a coal heaver need not be ashamed of, and not a little embarrassed by two big red hands, protruding from the tight sleeves of his tunic.

With my proud privilege of writing "Bachelor of Letters" after my name — for it is three months since the university honoured me with that distinction — the reader will readily conceive that I regard myself as a person of no mean importance in this sublunary world.

A pocket mirror that I consult quite frequently, to verify the condition of my facial crinose system, might possibly tell me that that famous down, of which I am so proud, gives me a vague resemblance to a newly-hatched chicken. But never mind,— it suffices for me, to appreciate it at its real value, to see the ill-concealed envy that it inspires in most of my comrades.

About this time, our family had packed its goods and chattels, and removed from the department of the Lége to the environs of Paris. A distant cousin, of whom we knew next to nothing, had died and left to my mother a great sugar refinery at Billancourt. Up to that time, my father's occupation on his estate of Saint-Lager, near Châtillon, where I pursued my studies, had been purely agricultural. His first idea, therefore, had been to sell this unexpected and somewhat troublesome inheritance.

But he could not have disposed of the property at forced sale, without incurring a very considerable loss on its real value. Time was pressing, for autumn was approaching, and the work of sugar grinding is only carried on from October to April. On the other hand, my father reflected that his administrative abilities, — he had shown what they were for fifteen years, as Mayor of his commune, and member of the General Council, — especially when supplemented by the experience he had gained as director of a great agricultural enterprise, would make it quite possible for him to assume control of the works in his own person.

The concern was in an admirable condition of organization; there was a certain and steady sale for the product. Contracts had been signed with the farmers for their beets for several years ahead; the processes were per-



fectly simple. There was an assured fortune in sight at the end of a few years. "All there was to do, was to stoop and pick it up," said grandpa.

It was he who had first given his opinion in so many words that we should leave our province, and come and settle at Billancourt. It was certainly harder on him than on any other member of the family to renounce his habits of a lifetime, his house, his beloved garden.

"But it is a sacrifice that we owe to Albert's future," he declared.

And all objections paled their fires before this unanswerable argument.

The time was also at hand, when, my studies being finished at the Lycée of Châtillon-sur-Lèze, it would be necessary to send me to Paris to complete them, and prepare for the examinations for admission to a State school. It was naturally a subject of grief and anxiety to my parents to see this moment drawing near. And here was an opportunity of escaping that separation, of being all together in our own house at Paris!

Mamma and grandpa adopted the plan with such enthusiasm, that it was soon a settled question. Our good Aunt Aubert, who had long been one of the family, and always did her best to spoil me, asserted that she would follow us to Greenland, if necessary.

There was no intention of going so far as that. One small circumstance, however, came near nipping our project in the bud.

My father had seen the injudiciousness of embarking in the new enterprise, without adequate capital. This capital, unfortunately, our cousin had not left behind him when he departed from this wicked world. He was an old bachelor, and, following the reprehensible custom of

his species, had made it his practice to spend all his income — and sometimes a little more.

It was necessary, consequently, to arrange for a loan ; to mortgage not only the refinery, but our property at Saint-Lager.

The idea made everybody tremble.

The temptation was great, however, and it was decided to take the risky step. The project had taken such a firm hold on every one, that it was not to be abandoned.

My father resigned his office as Mayor, and let out his farms on long leases ; the old mansion, in which we expected henceforth to pass only a month or two each year, was left to the care of trusty hands, and the caravan set out for Paris.

We had scarcely been installed there a week, when, with an eye to improving myself in rhetoric, I entered the Lycée Montaigne, in the capacity of a boarder, and this Sunday marked my first day's absence from the abode of learning.

Aunt Aubert had no more than heard the bell, than she came running in, all smiles.

“ Ah, my dear, here you are at last ! I am making one of those vanilla custards for you, that you are so fond of.”

And she fell to hugging me as if she never would leave off.

“ And I, auntie, beg you to accept this little bunch of roses ; for to-morrow is your birthday — did you know it ? ”

“ Why, that is true ! — He remembered it ! How nice of you, dear boy ! ”

And the good creature's eyes are full of tears. She gives me another series of hugs, which I return with interest.



“‘WHAT IS THAT?’ SAID AUNT AUBERT.”



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Now we all descend to the *rez-de-chaussée* and gather in our dining-room, where furniture and decorations are of brand-new "old oak." Papa, who is waiting for us, with his legs under the table, laughs in his beard, and looks at mamma and Aunt Aubert. As they unfold their napkins, both of them, almost simultaneously, give utterance to a little scream.

"A jewel case?" says mamma.

"What can it be?" hazards Aunt Aubert.

"It" appears to be two little boxes of red morocco, which, on being opened, disclose to view two pairs of diamond earrings nestling in their bed of blue velvet.

"Albert and I were delayed a little at the jeweller's," says my father. "We knew that to-morrow is Aunt Aubert's *fête*, and we thought these little pebbles might afford you pleasure."

Aunt Aubert is so touched by the delicate attention that she cannot speak a word, but two moist eyes rivalling the pretty stones in brilliancy speak for her with sufficient plainness.

"But to-morrow is not my *fête*," says mamma; "I am entitled to no present. These gems are really *too* beautiful."

"Bah! call it a payment on account against New Year's."

"Cousin," Aunt Aubert at last spoke up, with an air that she unsuccessfully endeavoured to make didactic, "I fear you have been guilty of an extravagance. Just see the fire these stones emit!" she added, showing them to grandpa.

"That is no more than it is their business to do, as diamonds," the latter rejoined, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"Bah!" said my father, "I would have you know that we are on the road to become millionaires. My first boil-

ing of sugar was the finest that ever left the works ; the chemist told me so yesterday, and the books bear him out."

The conversation presently turned on my experiences at the Lycée Montaigne.

"Well," asked grandpa, "what is your impression? How do you like your new surroundings?"

"Things are very much the same as at Châtillon. There are a great many more of us, — nine hundred boarders, I am told, and the principal, M. Montus, is a far more important personage. He is a commander in the Legion of Honour, if you please, and access to him is not always obtainable by ordinary mortals. With that exception, though, there is very little difference."

"The studies are not more difficult?"

"About that it is hard to say as yet," I replied, evasively.

The fact is that on the preceding day I had been rated seventeen in Latin Composition, a circumstance that was not at all flattering to the vanity of a provincial prize winner, and I did not care either to consider this first trial as decisive or to say much of the result. I was not displeased, therefore, when another subject was broached.

"I saw M. Desbans, your professor of mathematics, yesterday," my father remarked.

"The boys call him Tronc-de-Cône," I replied, with a smile that I was unable to suppress.

"Tronc-de-Cône, eh? Well, that is not a surname that a professor of mathematics should take offense at," my father gravely rejoined, "although it does not come with a very good grace from a lot of silly youngsters like you. M. Desbans is a very eminent man; he carried off dis-

tinguished honours in his time, both at the *École Polytechnique* and at the *École Normale*, scientific section, and it won't be long before he will be elected to the Institute, a distinction that he has earned by his profound researches. That is what I was told by M. Raynaud, our engineer, who was his schoolmate. It was at his recommendation that I went to see M. Desbans to ask him to give you private lessons, and I am pleased to inform you that he will."

"But, my dear father," I strenuously objected, "I shall have no time to give to mathematics without neglecting my other studies. I already have as much as I can do to keep up with my class."

"Good! I assured myself, after consulting competent authorities, that that is a fear for which there is no foundation. An hour or two daily devoted to mathematics will not interfere with your other studies, and at the end of the year will entitle you to your degree as bachelor of science. That will give you more liberty of choice when you come to select a career. Don't you think that is an advantage?"

"I don't say that it is not, but in selecting rhetoric for my principal study the object was to get all the benefit possible from it. Don't you think it would be better —"

"No, I do not. On the contrary, I am convinced that the study of mathematics, even if regarded only in the light of simple intellectual gymnastics, cannot fail to strengthen your understanding, giving increased precision to your style and stability to your taste. Even from an exclusively literary point of view, I am certain that it will be assuring you an advantage over your comrades."

"Are you not afraid, cousin," Aunt Aubert here intervened, "that such close application may prove too much for the poor fellow's strength?"

She had been exhibiting signs of impatience for some minutes.

"True," said my father, with a laugh, "Albert *does* look like a young man incapable of supporting much fatigue. Look at those shoulders once, Aunt Aubert; don't you think they reflect credit on the university? Besides, there is nothing like change of occupation to avoid fatigue. Albert will exercise an additional half-hour in the gymnasium, if necessary, and you will see that he will be stouter and healthier than ever."

And as I maintained a diplomatic silence, —

"Come," my father continued, "I see that I must own up to everything."

I looked at him rather doubtfully.

"I saw some one besides M. Desbans. I also saw M. Goudouneix, the master-at-arms of the school, a charming man, who very kindly promised to teach his art to a strapping young fellow of my acquaintance."

My eyes began to dance in my head. It had long been my wish to take fencing lessons, and now the desire of my heart was gratified by my dear father. I impulsively left my seat and went over and embraced him.

"More devices for breaking all the bones in his body!" murmured Aunt Aubert.

"Oh, no; on the contrary, it affords means of protecting life and honour," said grandpa, who had himself enjoyed some reputation as a swordsman about 1826.

"Don't talk like that; you make one's flesh creep," cried Aunt Aubert.

My father thought a diversion would be in order.

"Mr. Goudouneix told me that young Lecachey, my banker's son, will share your lessons. Do you know him?"

“I think I have heard the name, but I never took notice of the bearer of it. He is probably a day scholar.”

After breakfast my father went off about his business and I ascended to the drawing-room with mamma and Aunt Aubert. While chatting with them I looked through a number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that was lying on the table.

“Hello!” I suddenly exclaimed, “here is an article by M. Pellerin on Aristophanes and Greek comedy.”

“But you don’t know that the writer is your old tutor, do you?” asked my mother.

“Oh, I have n’t the least doubt — E. Pellerin — his name is Edouard. Besides, he spent two years in Greece as a student at the School of Athens after passing his brilliant examination for a fellowship, and Aristophanes was always a favourite subject with him.”

“His article is very interesting; learned, without being heavy.”

“You need not fear for M. Pellerin; he will get on. To think that only six years ago he was my tutor! — it does n’t seem possible, does it? But then he has worked so hard; all who know him have the highest regard and admiration for him.”

“You used to love him, if I remember right?” said Aunt Aubert.

“Love him? I should say I did! who could help loving a man so kind, so patient, so learned, and yet so modest? Of all our masters at Châtillon there is none of whom Baudouin and I retain such pleasant recollections.”

“Did not he and your friend Baudouin correspond?” my mother asked.

“Yes, for a year or two. I think he was fonder of Baudouin than he was of me. M. Pellerin always said he



had the soul of an artist, and he wrote him five or six times after leaving the lycée. But he was engrossed in his pursuits; he departed for the East shortly afterward, and we have heard nothing of him for this long time."

CHAPTER II.

TO MONSIEUR JACQUES BAUDOIN, AT BOURGAS, NEAR
CHÂTILLON-SUR-LÈZE.

“YES, my dear Baudouin, here I am at Paris, an inmate of the Lycée Montaigne, and very sorry, I assure you, that you and I are no longer classmates, as we were to our mutual pleasure and advantage during so many long years. The Lycée Montaigne, as you are perhaps aware, occupies buildings recently erected in the quarter of the Champs Élysées. It appears that for a long time the residents of Passy, Neuilly, and western Paris generally (not forgetting Billancourt), had been complaining that all the lycées were crowded together, in two or three quarters, and finally the Board of Education determined to rectify the matter. The proof of the wisdom of their action is that the Lycée Montaigne, although only completed a short time since, has already more than nine hundred boarders and eleven hundred day scholars.

“That is equivalent to saying that ours is not a little toy college like that of Châtillon, and that your old friend, a single unit in a total almost as large as that of a regiment of infantry, sometimes feels a little lost in the midst of such an aggregation of humanity.

Picture to yourself, on one side of the Rue de Chaillot, a lofty, brand-new, staringly white façade, ornamented with laurel wreaths carved in relief, and pierced with tall

windows over three enormous carriage entrances. One of these entrances is for the principal, the proctor, and the other dignitaries who have lodgings in the edifice ; another, to the right, is reserved for the steward's department, and the administrative service ; the third, to the left, is used by the professors and the students.

“ Enter that door with me. We find ourselves in a spacious vestibule, shut off in its entire breadth by a high, wrought iron railing, which, notwithstanding its ornate workmanship, is none the less a railing. Beyond this barrier extends a great rectangular courtyard, surrounded with a colonnade ; it is the reviewing ground. To right and left of the vestibule, two great marble staircases, conducting, one to the parlor and thence to the office and reception-rooms of the principal, the other to the recitation-rooms. The classes are domiciled in another building, situated in the rear of the one I am attempting to describe to you, and accessible to the day scholars by special doors opening on a side street.

“ I would say here that there are no *little boys* at the Lycée Montaigne ; candidates for admission enter the intermediate or the upper forms. Primary scholars are all sent to a small college instituted expressly for them out in the fields, at the foot of Mount Valérien, and not far from the village of Nanterre. But to come back to the vestibule :

“ Here to the left is the lodge, — no ! we won't say that ; it is not sufficiently respectful, — say the office, the study, the salon of M. le Concierge. Ah, my dear Baudouin, if Father Barbotte, our old porter at Châtillon, could see *these* quarters once ! His nose would come down on his mustache until it became a nose of nearly normal size. Aubusson carpets, mirrors, a great mahogany secretary, fauteuils



“THE OFFICE, THE STUDY, THE PARLOUR OF M. LE
CONCIERGE.”



in green velvet, and in the midst of all this splendour a tall, portly gentleman, solemn as a notary, and whose condescending politeness gives you an impression of your utter nothingness. Take my word for it, he would never stoop to sell tarts and apples to his subjects! It is as much as ever if he deigns to honour them with a patronizing look as they pass by. You will think I am romancing, but I assure you it is all quite true. He has a clerk.

“A clerk who is always seated at a mahogany desk and keeps a record of the exits and entrances for His Excellency, Monseigneur le Concierge.

“‘I don’t see anything so very extraordinary in that,’ he said one day to somebody who had innocently expressed his astonishment, ‘the keeper of the Conciergerie has a clerk.’

“We will ascend the left-hand staircase, and follow this long corridor, which brings us to Division No. 1. It is here that your humble servant roosts, in company with some thirty other rhetoricians. As at Châtillon, we are divided into *freshmen* and *veterans*, according as we have or have not accomplished a first year in rhetoric. You will probably be surprised to learn that, although I am a bachelor and ex-rhetorician of the Lycée of Châtillon, I am classed among the freshmen. That is because I am not eighteen yet, which allows me to compete at the general examination as a *freshman*, and it is customary to take advantage of that privilege.

“And it is well, too, that this state of affairs exists, for without it I fear my chances would be mighty slim at that same examination.

“My poor Baudouin! what number do you suppose was awarded me in Latin Composition, no longer ago than day before yesterday? Seventeen! ‘What a fall was there,

my countrymen!' Flattering for Châtillon-sur-Lèze, is n't it? I, who was considered a prodigy on the *Verumenimvero* and the *Quandoquidem!* I, who ever since the day when Parmentier, on his admission to the Naval Academy, belied all prognostics as to his literary future, was regarded as the favourite of our departmental muses. Seventeenth at Paris! where there are ten other lycée, — that is to say one hundred and seventieth on a general list; there you have the melancholy truth.

"It is true that I stand eighth among the freshmen, but the subserviency, the artful combinations, the calculations of age that were required to attain that magnificent result! I am obliged to confess to you, dear friend, that I am a little discouraged. You see I was very well pleased with my lucubration, — an address of welcome by the Senator Tertius Quirinus Mala to Scipio Africanus. When the class was dismissed I think I would not have traded my chances, so certain was I of bearing off first honours, for an absolute assurance of being second. And then the complimentary remarks with which M. Auger seasoned his verdict!

"'M. Besnard. Latin Composition, correct enough in a grammatical point of view,' he said, 'but dull and prosy in style, abounding in Gallicisms, and perfectly commonplace.'

"That was the slap in the face I received. Pleasant, was n't it? to hear oneself handled in that manner before seventy-five young cubs, all predisposed to look on a fellow as a numskull if he happens to hail from Grenoble or Châtillon! But I will have my revenge, see if I don't!

"One consolation was that I was not the only one to *flunk*, as they call it here. Almost every one of my com-



rades got his lick with the wrong side of the tongue. A terrible man is he, that M. Auger! Tall, thin, pale, with a gray bristling mustache like a half-pay cavalry colonel's, hair cut *en-brosse*, extremely black eyebrows, and a red rosette in his buttonhole. He does not condescend to put on his academic gown, but simply throws it across the arm of his chair, for appearance's sake. A word from him in his big deep voice cuts you in two. You should see how silent and attentive everybody is in his class, and how all move as if at the tap of the drum. And yet he has never in his life inflicted punishment. All is that if a student undertakes to play pranks in his room, he merely sends him before the proctor with an intimation that his presence has ceased to be desirable. Such, at least, is the tradition.

“One thing certain is that he can't be beat in expounding Tacitus. You have no idea, my dear Baudouin, of all he discovers in a phrase, a line, a word. We used to think that M. Schiltz had some acquaintance with Tacitus, did n't we? Well, his commentaries amount to just nothing at all beside M. Auger's. The man must have all the living languages at his finger ends, to say nothing of Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, the origin of language, and all the rest of it. Sometimes he will hold forth for a whole hour on a syllable, a root, and tell you such lots of curious and interesting things, opening up entirely new horizons. It is frightful, don't you know, to think of all one has to learn when one has finished with college. I am beginning to see that the first six or seven years are merely an introduction to broader studies. Until now we have been neither more nor less than children learning to read and write; we have been preparing ourselves by preliminary exercises for what is, in fact, our real work.

“I cannot truthfully say that I am greatly pleased with M. Auger. In spite of his bearish manner, it would be impossible to find a better teacher. But if you look for sympathy and tenderness there, you will not find it. His most gracious compliment for the first in Latin Composition, a veteran named Dutheil, was :

“‘M. Dutheil. Theme pretty well worked up.’

“The old stagers say that that is as far as he ever allows himself to go in commending an exercise.

“But here we are at Division No. 2, to which I started to introduce you. There are some forty of us students in there, seated at two rows of desks, the benches of which have backs. I will say incidentally that those benches are an improvement that might be adopted with advantage in other colleges. Facing us, between the two windows, is a great blackboard ; to the right is the customary bookcase, to the left the chair of the usher.

“That individual is a man of an entirely different stripe from M. Pellerin. His name is Valadier, I am told. He is a little, stocky, bald, brown-faced man, with eyes that glow like living coals in their cavernous orbits, prominent cheek-bones, a yellow complexion, and a temperament to correspond, namely, of the most taciturn. During the eight days that I have sat under his ferule, I have not heard him speak twenty words. For the various exercises of the day, such as recitations, recreation, dismissal, and so forth, he has invented a code of signals, transmitted by a certain number of taps with his penholder, on the arm of his chair, which relieve him of the necessity of opening his lips. That may appear strange at first, but one quickly comes to understand this language as readily as the telegraph-operator reads off the message that is passing over the wires by the clicking of his instru-

ment. M. Valadier has, in particular, a way of commanding *silence!* That never fails of its effect, — just three little sharp taps of the penholder.

“It would not surprise me if this system were the result of a profound *Machiavellism*. He has made the discovery that big boys like us prefer to be called to order mechanically, so to speak, rather than be accosted by name. Be that as it may, the result is a success. There is a sort of tacit agreement between the master and us, to leave one another in peace. You will understand why silence is a necessity to M. Valadier, when I tell you that he is a poet, and spends his time in fabricating *bouts-rimés*.

“I have this information from one of my new comrades, a young man named Chavasse, who professes the most serene disdain for these poetic recreations. He is a fat, red-faced, apple-cheeked boy, with china-blue eyes, that only light up in the refectory, and an inferior maxillary of prodigious development. Do you remember in the treatise on natural history that we studied a year ago, the picture representing the jaw of a carnivorous as compared with that of a herbivorous animal? Well, I never look at Chavasse but I think of that memorable example, and tell myself that, beside him, I must have the air of a vegetarian. You will scarce believe me when I tell you that the wretched boy, only eighteen, already has a paunch.

“‘Chavasse is building out in front,’ says, with a grave face, Thomereau, the funny man of the class.

“There is another, with whom you would not be likely to fall in love, — Thomereau. Imagine, my dear Baudouin, a sort of bandylegged turnspit, with a big head, a mouth cleft from ear to ear, a trumpet of a nose, and hair always in disorder, whose self-appointed mission here on earth is to make his neighbours laugh. He considers all means

fair to attain that glorious end; quips, cranks, and quiddities of every kind, plays on words, and puns — particularly puns. He gets them off at every moment, and on the slightest provocation, — sometimes good, but much oftener bad, according to the decision of the Fates.

“The happiest effort of his life, as he himself confesses to me, was one that he achieved day before yesterday, in M. Auger’s room. Thomereau, as usual, was gaping at the ceiling, while the professor was explaining an ode of Horace.

“‘Monsieur Thomereau,’ said the professor, ‘you are not following the text, and I see that you are thinking of something entirely different.’

“‘Beg pardon, m’sieu,’ replied my joker, with a voice like the quack of a duck, ‘*je pense, donc je suis!*’ — if Descartes is to be believed.*

“And everybody laughed, even M. Auger.

“As a rule, however, he is content to harass us with frightful ready-made puns, of which he always keeps a stock on hand to meet emergencies.

“Dutheil, whom I mentioned as the leader of the class, is a boy of quite a different kind, a sober, serious, level-headed fellow, whom one feels can always be depended on, — somewhat after your style.

“You are doubtless aware that our friend Verschuren, of Châtillon, is here at the Lycée Montaigne with me. He is even in my division, although he is preparing for Saint-Cyr, and belongs to the category here designated as *Cornichons*. The Saint-Cyrians’ quarters are overcrowded, it appears; six of them have been lodged with us.

*The pun hinges on the words *je suis*, which mean indifferently, *I am* or *I follow*. “I think, therefore I am,” Descartes axiom; “I think, therefore I follow,” Chavasse’s emendation.

We have also four *Taupius*, or candidates for the Polytechnique, which contributes to shed no little distinction on Division No. 1, as you may well believe.

“What shall I say of the regulations of the Lycée? The régime is exactly the same as at Châtillon. Here, as there, our movements are regulated by the beat of the drum. The bill of fare is also varied from day to day in a similar manner. The hours of study and recreation are the same. Still, there is a difference that is worthy of being noted, — we are at liberty to go out on Sundays, and on Thursdays, as well upon a written request of the parents, instead of having leave only once a month as in the province.

“Adieu. Write soon, and let your letter be a good long one. I am dying to hear from you, what you are doing, what you are going to do.

ALBERT BESNARD.

“P. S. — I had almost forgotten to tell you there is a splendid article by M. Pellerin in the current number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Papa promises he will send it to you.”

CHAPTER III.

MY FRIEND MOLÉCULE. — A MISPRIZED POET. — LECA-
CHEY SHOWS HIS COLOURS. — TRONC-DE-CÔNE.

ON re-reading Baudouin's letter, which he had preserved and was so obliging as to lend me when I intimated to him that I was about to write my memoirs, I perceive, not without confusion, that there is not a word in it of Molécule.

That one of my comrades who answered to this mellifluous surname, but whose real name was Chapuis, was, nevertheless, one of the notabilities of the class, — although his distinction certainly was not due to the number of his inches. For six days he and I had been almost inseparable. But, doubtless, I had feared to excite Baudouin's jealousy, who was always a little sensitive on such matters, and that accounts for my silence in regard to my new friend.

On the very first day of my appearance at the lycée, Molécule had revealed himself to me in the most elevated aspect — intellectually, I mean — that it is given the human race to assume : that of the poet, namely. And not a Latin poet, either, as one might suppose and as would have been perfectly natural at college, but an unmistakable, full-fledged poet in the French language.

And what was more, it was in my honour that he had straddled Pegasus.

It happened in the class-room. I was absorbed in the fabrication of my first Latin composition, which I was desirous should not be below the level of my Châtillonian reputation, when I received, through the medium of my neighbor, Chavasse, an envelope bearing my address, which I tore open with trembling fingers.

The envelope contained a sheet of white paper, and exactly in the middle of the sheet, in small and beautiful chirography, was a sonnet dedicated to Albert Besnard. What would I give to-day had I preserved that poem, the only one I ever inspired in my life, so that I might be able to submit it to posterity! But, alas! those verses, like so many others that have gone before and come after, have disappeared from mortal ken. All I can state positively is that they welcomed me to the Lycée Montaigne with a warmth and enthusiasm that went straight to my heart. They were signed *Léo Chapuis*.

You may imagine the eagerness with which, when the noon recess came, I inquired for information about Chapuis.

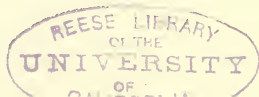
“Chapuis?” replied the first boy whom I accosted; “there he is, that little whiffet over yonder — Chapuis, alias Molécule!”

He was so small and insignificant that one would have taken him for a boy eleven years old rather than for a student of rhetoric. There was the dawning promise of a beard, and his alert black eyes, pointed features, and hair plastered closely to his head gave him something of the appearance of a mouse.

I can see him now, smiling at me in a friendly way and displaying a row of white teeth as I stepped toward him.

“Was it you who sent me those verses?”

“Yes; it is my custom to extend a greeting to all new-



comers, by way of keeping my hand in. How were you pleased with my sonnet?"

"Much obliged, on behalf of *all newcomers* — they must be immensely gratified. Your verses are very pretty."

"Really?" said the little man, his face radiant with smiles. "You are not making fun of me?"

"No; 'pon my word, I assure you your sonnet is excellent."

He came up to me, immediately, with a confidential air.

"I see that you are a person of taste. Do you write verses?"

"No; I have never attempted it."

"Ah! perhaps you are writing a novel, then?"

"Nor that, either."

"I have it! You are working for the theatre."

Molécule spoke with entire sincerity. He apparently could not conceive for a moment that I had no literary sins upon my conscience. I did not undeceive him, owing to my ridiculous false shame.

"A comedy, no doubt?" he continued. "No? A tragedy, then? Come, I see what the matter is — you are close-mouthed; you don't want to disclose your subject. You need have no fear of me, though; when you come to know me better you won't hesitate to give me your confidence. If you like, I will write the couplets for your vaudeville. Poetry is my strong point, you see."

Alas! this fact was soon to be practically demonstrated to me. From this time forth not a day passed that I was not called on to read some poetic manifestation of Chapuis's inexhaustible genius. Epistles, odes, harmonies, symphonies, elegies, trilogies, satires, idyls, epigrams, ballads, triolets, virelays, all flowed with equal facility from his teeming brain. From morning till night he was

manufacturing rhymes, which, willy - nilly, one must read and admire with him. It was not always amusing, although there were times when the comic element was not altogether wanting.

For instance, he was accustomed to inveigh in the most violent terms against the vices of his contemporaries, and to abandon himself metaphorically to the gloomiest misanthropy, although under ordinary circumstances he was the jolliest and pleasantest of companions.

I did not fail to banter him now and then on this slight inconsistency, but on the whole he had no reason to find fault with my criticisms, and such was the progress I made in his esteem that at the end of two or three days he decided to open his heart to me.

"Listen," he said ; "I have a great secret to impart to you. I have no need to caution you to observe the most perfect silence ; you yourself will see the necessity of it."

Of course this exordium aroused my curiosity to the highest pitch.

"Know, then, the mystery of my life," Molécule continued, trying to give a tone of tragedy to his little piping voice : "I am writing an epic poem !"

"Really and truly ?"

"Yes, my dear fellow ; or, rather, I should say *the* epic poem — the epic that is wanting to complete the glories of France. I have already composed five cantos out of twenty-four. You shall give me your opinion of it."

Molécule spoke with such conviction that I never even thought of laughing. His assurance astounded me. He went on :

"By the way, I can tell you what its subject is, but promise me first not to divulge it to any one. Have I your word ?"

I nodded affirmatively.

“It is no joking matter, you understand — twenty thousand lines at the very least. But it is going on swimmingly. I have confidence in you; my subject is — Tobacco! That is what you might call an idea, hey?”

“Oh, yes, I don’t deny that it is an idea, but for an epic poem —”

“It is splendid, my dear fellow, splendid! You shall see what I have done. And speaking of tobacco, may I offer you a pinch?”

The wretched youth thrust his hand into his pocket, and drawing forth a cheap wooden snuff-box, extended it, fraternally, to me.

“What! are you a snuff-taker?” I inquired with surprise.

“Of course I am, and a smoker, too, if you have no objections.”

I was literally horror-struck.

“Ah!” I cried, “if that is the case I am not surprised —”

Just then the sound of the drum luckily cut short my remark, for my reflection was not of a nature to greatly please poor Molécule. What was it at which I was not surprised? That he was of such diminutive proportions. For it is an acknowledged fact that the use of tobacco in early life arrests physical development, as my father had repeatedly warned me.

Such was my new comrade, whom I had refrained from mentioning in my letter to my best friend, Jacques Baudouin.

Neither had I said anything to him of Lecachey, although I had already made his acquaintance previous to meeting him at the fencing school. It was during the lecture on history that he was revealed to me.



“ MY SUBJECT IS — TOBACCO ! ”

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M. Aveline, who presided in this department, certainly could not be accused of fetichism toward his specialty.

"History," he was accustomed to say to us, "can only be considered as the more or less truthful rendering of a text of which the real significance is known to no one. Therefore, gentlemen, I shall not attempt to explain the events which constitute part of our course when you are liable to see my explanations controverted to-morrow by superior authority. I shall confine myself to giving you a certain number of dates and historical landmarks, indicating to you the principal writers who have treated of these occurrences. You will study them closely, and on each event will form that opinion which, after mature reflection, seems to you most judicious."

That said, M. Aveline would cast a sharp look at us through the gold-bowed spectacles that surmounted his long, thin nose, read off a list of a score or so of names and dates, and wind up by giving us the titles of half a dozen authorities in which we were sure to find the most contradictory opinions.

"You will each of you select within these limits the subject that you desire to treat in writing for the next lesson," he added. "All I ask of you is to let me have your individual judgment in your own language, not repeating parrot-like the words of your authors. Now, and for this day only, we will pass on to other exercises."

This manner of hearing a recitation in history had already excited my wonder not a little. What completed my bewilderment was to see M. Aveline take a volume from his chair, open it at a place indicated by a folded paper between the leaves, and say:

"I will read you a few pages of Saint-Réal's 'Conspiracy of the Spaniards against Venice.' He is an excellent model

of the narrative style, and is not as popular as he should be in our times."

M. Aveline was a good reader, there was no denying that. But what a strange way of teaching history!

"All the same, for the last four years one of his pupils has regularly carried off the prize at the examination," said my neighbour on the left, as if in reply to my thought.

Naturally enough I turned and looked at him. He was a day scholar, a handsome little gentleman, elegantly dressed in a suit that it was plain came from the shop of a fashionable tailor; he carried his perfumed handkerchief in his sleeve, wore a monocle cocked in his eye, and his air generally was one of well-bred assurance and superiority. There was no sign of text-book or note-book before him on the table; nothing but a pair of spotless uncreased gloves, a resplendent silk hat with a white satin lining, and a little whalebone switch topped with a silver handle.

"He is a professor after my own heart," he continued, in an undertone. "He is not eternally bothering a body with tiresome questions."

I was interested in the reading, so that a glance was the only reply I vouchsafed my neighbour. Not in the least disconcerted, however:

"Were you at the Fontainebleau races last Sunday?" he asked.

"No; I have not been long in Paris," I replied, apologetically.

"You missed the best meet of the season — a splendid field. I had laid my money on *Spavento* at 4½; he was the favourite, you know. I thought I had a sure thing, but alas! —"

Here the professor ceased reading.

"Monsieur Lecachey," he said, looking in our direction,

“I will not ask you not to talk in class, it would doubtless be requiring too much of you ; I will only request you not to talk so loud.”

Lecachey ! the name reminded me of what my father had said to me concerning his banker’s son. So that was the scion of the famous firm in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and my prospective companion in the fencing school. I looked at him with an increase of interest which he did not fail to notice.

“What is the matter ?” he asked, with a look of uneasiness. “I have n’t inked my nose, have I ?”

“Not a bit,” I replied, with a laugh. “What made me prick up my ears was your name ; my father told me that he has business relations with your father, and that you and I are to be comrades at the fencing school.”

“Ah ! then you are Besnard ? I have heard — ”

“Monsieur Lecachey, I see you are determined not to modulate that voice of yours !” here spoke up M. Aveline.

This time we held our tongues and the reading came to an end without further incident.

“Well, then, we shall meet again this evening, I suppose ?” Lecachey said to me when the drum beat.

He shook hands with me, carefully adjusted his glossy hat on his head, took his gloves and little cane, and marched off in his glory. Why should I attempt to conceal it ? Lecachey had produced a profound impression on me. Such elegance, coolness, and easy grace confused me. How could he receive M. Aveline’s rebukes with such unconcern, and be so profoundly versed in the dark mysteries of the turf ? And that coat — those trousers — that handkerchief — that monocle !

He completed his conquest of me at the fencing school, where M. Goudouneix, formerly a regimental instructor in

the use of the foils, presently began to initiate us into the mysteries of his art.

There was more reason for the admiration which M. Desbans, our mathematical professor, inspired in me. I was deeply attached to him, and was already perfectly reconciled with my father's happy thought in selecting him to be my tutor.

Tronc-de-Cône, as the entire school called him, without his knowing it, was simply admirable as a professor. I never met any one who possessed in the same degree as he the gift of simplifying the most intricate questions, of throwing light into dark corners and dispelling difficulties as the wind carries off a puff of smoke. His language was sober, clear, correct, effective as a syllogism, and yet elegant by reason of its precision. You should have seen him at the blackboard, tracing faultless circles with one motion of his sure hand, building up great edifices of figures, marshalling in serried battalions his wonderful equations! No artist devoted to his art could exhibit more conscientiousness than he would do in demonstrating the most elementary theorem. In cases of more difficulty he was not satisfied to have the demonstration satisfactory; he was determined it should be decisive, crushing, overwhelming. The impression produced on us at times when he was struggling with some abstruse problem was that of a hand to hand conflict between Titans. It seemed as if we could see him hurl his adversary to the ground, kneel on its chest and throttle it until it was forced to acknowledge itself vanquished. I often wonder, when I think of it, how any one could have him as professor and not be enamoured of mathematics.

Such, nevertheless, was the ruling obliquity of the class in rhetoric, under pretence that we belonged to the

section of letters and that our scientific ration was of the slenderest, it was considered necessary to good form to slight this branch of study. Our tasks were performed perfunctorily, "under the leg;" the work at the blackboard was bungled shamefully. Those who were strongest in Greek and Latin were most hardened in this respect, and I very well remember that Dutheil himself foolishly boasted of his slight acquaintance with the family of X's.

M. Desbans, like all the professors of the section of sciences, was excused from wearing the academic gown; because of the immoderate use he made of the chalk from morning until night, he dressed habitually in light colors. Add to that a smooth shaven chin, hair of a pepper and salt hue, to correspond with his clothes, cheeks as red as love-apples, and bright handsome eyes, a little inclined to rove, as becomes a man whose thoughts are perpetually wandering in space.

His absent-mindedness was naturally the occasion of a host of small and more or less ingenious mystifications which his pupils, and sometimes even his younger colleagues, were pleased to visit on him. One of the most common of these pleasantries consisted in obliterating, under his very nose and without his perceiving it, one of the letters with which he had marked his diagram on the blackboard. With perfect composure he would replace the missing sign, perhaps only to find it missing again a moment later. Scarcely a week passed that this venerable jest was not repeated.

Sometimes, however, the boys were unable to restrain their merriment and M. Desbans was apprised of what was going on. Then the slumbering lion in him woke.

He proceeded to what he called *the tracing of the diagonal*, — a strange manœuvre, practised by no one but

himself, which consisted in drawing an imaginary line from the end of one bench to the opposite extremity of another bench, after which he noted the names of those students who chanced to be beneath the line for the purpose of visiting on them the penalties made and provided in such cases. It was one way of fixing the responsibility.

It was ludicrous to see the dodging of the unlucky ones to avoid being caught under the fatal line. But it availed them not. Tronc-de-Cône had accurately counted the number of his victims ; he was inexorable in demanding his full tale, and the list of the proscribed was transmitted to the proctor without delay.

Not that he was influenced by the slightest feeling of revengefulness. He was too kind for that, and I believe that if he had listened to the promptings of his heart he would have much preferred to laugh with us over his incurable defect ; but he considered it his duty to be strict when the occasion demanded it, and was not the man to tamper with his duty, however unpleasant it might be. Dear M. Desbans ! a single hour at the blackboard alone, in his company, taught me to appreciate at its real worth his perfect uprightness, his childlike candour reinforced by the most unerring judgment and a mathematical genius that was truly wonderful.

After that I should have regarded it as little less than criminal to participate in the tricks that were played on him. I was often forced, however, contrary to my inclination, to be a passive spectator of performances which, while harmless in themselves, no doubt, were yet to be regretted as casting ridicule on a distinguished savant and worthy man.

CHAPTER IV.

TO MONSIEUR ALBERT BESNARD, AT THE LYCÉE MONTAIGNE, PARIS.

“YOU ask me, my dear Parisian, what I am doing at Bourgas. *Eh, parbleu!* I chafe and fume all day long; that’s what I do. I chafe because I have finished my education without reflecting that it is only a beginning, and that to make a long journey for the sake of arriving nowhere is a useless and absurd proceeding. I chafe because I am a sort of gentleman and can repeat a number of lines of the *Georgics*, and at the same time am unable to be of any assistance to my poor mother, who is ruining her health in trying to run our little farm. I chafe because I have a bachelor’s degree in my pocket, and not the ghost of a trade or calling at my finger ends. I chafe because I am compelled to eat a bread that it would trouble me to earn.

“My poor Albert, how I congratulate you on having none of those cares to worry you! How lucky you are that for a year or two you have only to learn your lessons and perform your tasks, then enter the law school, after which you will slip into the comfortable leather-covered armchair that is awaiting you in a stock-broker’s office! That is the future that your excellent father has marked out for you, is it not? And what better can you do than follow the beaten highway that his loving-kindness has prepared for you?

“As regards birth and wealth, my dear friend, I am a nullity; I am but the very ordinary offspring of a small farmer. I need to make for myself, and that immediately and without being the cause of further expense, a decent and adequate subsistence. How am I to do it and what course am I to adopt? I have been reflecting on the problem night and day for months, and am no nearer a solution now than in the beginning. Would it not be better for me if I could lend a hand in the work that is going on upon the farm?”

“And yet, it is a fine thing to have gone through college and made acquaintance with literature and science. When I think of the matter calmly, I can find nothing but gratitude in my heart for those who conferred on me that inestimable boon.

“Mamma and I had a grand pow-wow on this subject yesterday. You know how dearly she loves me and how she is ready to strain every nerve to start me in a career of my selection. What did she do but propose to pack me off to Paris, to join you at the Lycée Montaigne and share your studies with you! But I knew that such an effort would mean ruin for her, and I refused — with what bitter regret I need not say.

“After a long and full discussion of the matter, we arrived at this decision: I am to stay here with her until the coming December and deliberate maturely on what is best for me to do. Then, my resolution once formed, I shall stick to it undeviatingly. It is more than likely that my decision will be for the military career. In that case I should enlist for two years in a line regiment, to give me an opportunity to prepare myself at leisure for the examination at Saint-Cyr without putting mamma to more expense. You know that was what good old Captain

Biradent, our professor of gymnastics at the Lycée of Châtillon, advised me to do. He always declared that I would make an excellent major of chasseurs à pied. I don't feel quite as sure of that as he did; however, if my choice falls in that direction, I shall try to do my best.

“In the meantime, while waiting to know my fate, I sit for hours at a stretch and contemplate the form of things, studying the movements, the lines, the outline and perspective of animals and men; I cannot conceive how a man blessed with a pair of eyes could ever tire of using them. That might with considerable justice be called loafing, but — how shall I express my meaning? — the occupation seems to teach me something; this education of my eyes constitutes for me a study which interests me more than I care to have it do, and I reproach myself for it because it is without definite object. Outside of that, when I tell myself that I ought to be doing something, do you know what I turn my hand to? I go fishing; I take magnificent carp in the Lèze. I should like to hunt, but if I were to take out a permit I should seem to be treating myself to a luxury to which I had no right; I should be obliged to ask mamma for money to pay for the privilege, purchase a gun, and feed a great dog, and all that is more than she can afford.

“And, speaking of Captain Biradent, do you know that I miss him dreadfully, — him, his gymnasium, and his sound advice?

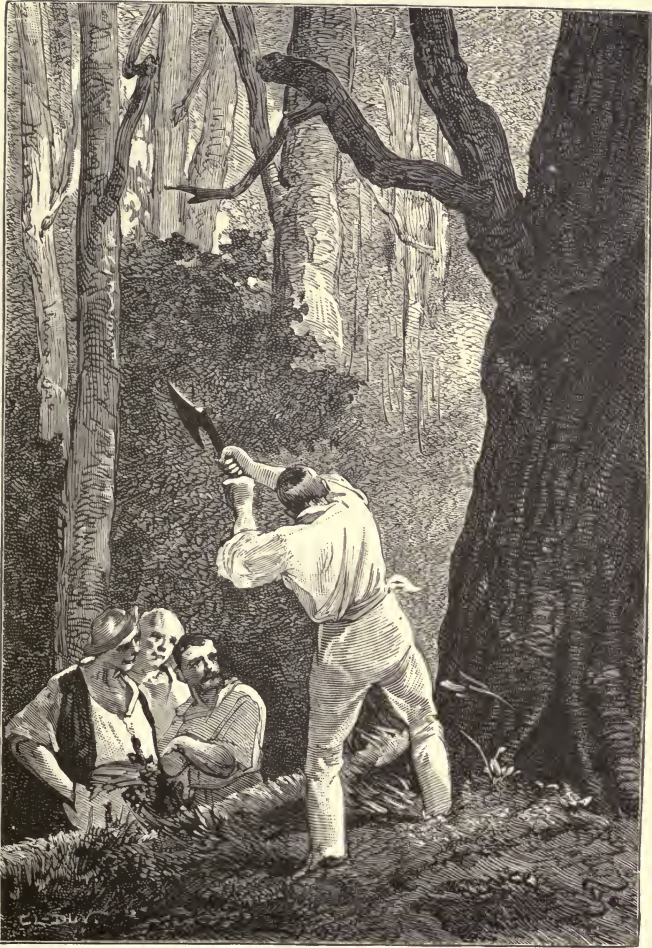
“I have made myself a trapèze; the blacksmith who comes every other day to set our plowshares managed to hammer out a pair of rings that answer fairly well. But my old-time zest is gone. You have no idea how monotonous those exercises become when you have no one



to share them with you. Emulation is the life and soul of gymnastics.

“I wonder if you could ever guess what is my favourite exercise just at the present time! It is felling great forest trees with an axe. A rather expensive amusement, you will say, and it is true that my humble means would not admit of it; I have no forests, no trees, and it is as much as ever if I own an axe. But my lucky star some time since caused me to foregather with an extremely affable and courteous young ranger, and it was while walking with him in the wood of Gua and observing the superb poses of the men as they laid low the magnificent oaks that I was seized with the desire to try my hand at the work. Since then, it has become a genuine passion with me, a passion the more ridiculously inconsistent that, as you are aware, no one more sincerely admires a beautiful tree in its lusty glory than your humble servant.

“Possibly it may be a result of that very admiration, but I love to pit my puny strength against one of those giants of the forest. So long as it is condemned, since it is doomed to fall in order to make way for other and more valuable growths, give its neighbours light and air, or afford space for the opening of a new road, why should it not fall by my hand? The labour develops my strength, affords wholesome exercise for my muscles, and is in itself an art. The giant is attacked near the ground, with well calculated blows, at each of which a great wedge-shaped chip is released. In the beginning, the woodsman may slash away with vigour, but as the wound becomes deeper and approaches the heart of the tree he has to proceed more cautiously and give his blows a definite direction. At last the entire enormous weight of trunk and branches is supported solely by a slender pedicle only a few centi-



“THE GIANT IS ATTACKED CLOSE TO THE GROUND.”

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metres in thickness. Then, due precautions having been observed, and the bystanders directed to a place of safety, a stout rope that has previously been made fast to the upper branches is tautened, and the lordly giant comes crashing to the ground. The shrubs and saplings in its path, small secondary lives whose fate is involved in that great life, are beaten down. Sometimes, away up in the summit, there is a bird's nest, but the young brood has long since left its quarters, fortunately, and the little dwelling is empty and deserted. The report of a cannon, the roar of a whole battery of artillery, is as nothing compared with the thundering crash of that fall. It is might, majesty, grandeur surviving even in the moment of dissolution. You will tell me that when in the spring the little birds return from their foreign trip they will vainly seek their familiar oak and will be compelled to build them a new house. Why should they not? Is it so desirable always to depend on the house of one's father's building? Is not the home provided by the labour of one's own hands the best?

“But I suppose you will say I have given no valid reason why I find such pleasure in playing the part of lord high executioner. Well, I will tell you; the real reason is emulation. The choppers employed by my friend, the ranger, all have such splendidly developed arms and shoulders that my first impulse was to draw them, my second to see if I could not equal them.

“I think that I am in a fair way to attain my end. But, apart from that, I have taken a liking to the occupation for its own sake, and now I am proud to say that I think I can fell a tree as handily as a professional wood-cutter.

“There is a calling all ready to my hand, you will say. You need not laugh; I have thought of it. But it would

be a disappointment for my poor mamma, whose dreams for me are all of wealth and glory.

“‘Was it for such an end as that that I sent you to college?’ she would be justified in saying to me.

“My friend, the ranger, advises me to enter the School of Forestry. I should like that very much. Life in the open air, under the lofty forest domes, in constant communion with nature, would suit me exactly. But it is an expensive career. In addition to the charge for board and tuition at the school, there are costly uniforms to be procured, which, together with other matters, put the project beyond our reach. The entire expense would amount to some ten or twelve thousand francs, and that is more than we have to spare. Therefore, I must be thinking of something else, and that is what I am doing, night and day.

“Adieu, — write me often and at length, as you did last time, with lots of details. Let me know what you are doing, share with me your more serious thoughts. Your Parisians cannot all be such frivolous creatures as you depict them. There is one thing in the world which I am determined shall not grow rusty — our friendship.

“JACQUES BAUDOIN.”

CHAPTER V.

THE CAGNOTTE. — A PHILOSOPHER.

AMONG Thomereau's intermittent manias, one of the most deplorable was to circulate in the class-room "questions," generally of a highly ridiculous nature, which no one could answer and of which he alone had the solution. The answer of the problem was most frequently a pun of venerable antiquity.

We used to laugh at these absurdities, but they often trenched too much on valuable time, and the more studious were ill-pleased to have their attention distracted by such idle nonsense.

In the end public sentiment manifested itself in almost unanimous protests, and one fine morning, Dutheil, upon whom the buffoon's mania seemed to produce a particularly aggravating effect, laid before us the following proposition :

"Gentlemen," he said to us as we came trooping out into the courtyard at recess time, "it is becoming every day more necessary to introduce reforms into the class, for unless we do we may as well give up trying to do our work. We might do worse than borrow from the Taupins an expedient which they assert works excellently."

"A truce to preambles! Give us the expedient!"

"You are all aware of the thousand little annoyances that owe their existence to our life in common, — a heed-

less fellow goes out and forgets to shut the door behind him, another gets possession of a book in the library and monopolizes it, a few will disturb a whole roomful of people by their noisy conversation, a senseless 'question' is handed round from bench to bench in study hours and distracts our attention from our work. Thus it is that twenty times a day occasions arise when we should all be glad if it were in our power to put a stop to an abuse that incommodes us, a trespass of some one on his neighbour's comfort and liberty —"

We were beginning to be puzzled by this exordium. What was Dutheil driving at? Our expectancy was voiced in those isolated exclamations and indistinct murmurs that the newspaper reports of parliamentary proceedings refer to as "signs of interest in the galleries."

"Well, gentlemen," pursued the orator, "those petty annoyances that we are all acquainted with and from which we all are sufferers, what is really their single and only cause? I will tell you, — it is the absence of a code of manners among us boys, a rigorous, inflexible code, in which all offences are provided for and an adequate penalty imposed for each delinquency —"

Chorus of voices: "That's true!"

"This is the conclusion, gentlemen, that was reached by the eminently practical minds of our colleagues of the *Taupinière*. They have done what we should have done long ago,—drawn up a full and complete list of all the small sins of which a member of the great scholastic fraternity may render himself guilty, to the detriment of good order and the public peace, and visited each peccadillo with a fine of a few centimes —"

(Here Dutheil drew from his pocket a sheet of paper and consulted it.)

“Here are the rules and regulations of the Taupins,” he continued. “They are in full force, and our neighbours find themselves the better for them. Laws that are self-imposed are seldom questioned. In this remarkable document, the following things are henceforth and forever forbidden :

“ ‘ First, to leave the door open, when it was previously closed ;

“ ‘ Secondly, to remain more than ten minutes at the blackboard ;

“ ‘ Thirdly, to leave the blackboard without having first wiped out all chalk marks ;

“ ‘ Fourthly, to neglect to replace the sponge ;

“ ‘ Fifthly, no one shall sneeze, or blow his nose in a loud and boisterous manner ;

“ ‘ Sixthly, to appropriate to one’s use for a longer period than fifteen minutes the books of reference intended for the public use ;

“ ‘ Seventhly, sleeping is prohibited in the studies, and in the class-rooms ;

“ ‘ Eighthly, no one shall disturb one or several comrades by idle and useless questions, whether oral or written ;

“ ‘ Ninthly, it is forbidden to trouble the public order, or call attention to oneself in an unseemly manner in any of the rooms set apart for public use.’

“Such are the nine articles of the code promulgated by the Taupins, and such is the general interest in securing their observance that perfect quiet now reigns in their quarters. Don’t you think it might be well if we, too, were to adopt so judicious a set of rules ?”

The proposition was received with very moderate enthusiasm.

“Good!” said a voice, “we have n’t rules enough as it is, it would seem that we must go to work and manufacture a lot of others!”

Dutheil stood his ground.

“I was looking for that objection, and you may be sure it was thought of among the Taupins as well as here. But the sanction given to the arrangement must not be lost sight of, — the question of the fines imposed for every offence, and which are the point on which the whole affair hinges. It is they that constitute the source of all the pleasure.”

“Is it a pleasure to pay fines?”

“No, not to pay them, exactly, but to make others pay them when they are detected transgressing.”

This prospect appeared to stimulate a little the languid interest of the audience.

“The product of those fines,” Dutheil insidiously continued, “goes into a common fund, a *cagnotte*, and at the end of the year this fund may be converted into books, weapons of the chase, a boat, or whatever those who have an interest in it may decide.”

The idea appeared less preposterous now, and it was clear that Dutheil had gained his cause.

“We might offer a prize for the encouragement of French poetry,” timidly suggested Molécule.

“Or endow a fund for purposes of travel and exploration,” proposed Verschuren.

“I have a better plan than that,” cried Chavasse: “it is to take the proceeds of the fines, and treat ourselves to the biggest spread that was ever heard of!”

Is it necessary to say that this suggestion met with an overwhelming success? It was the means, indeed, of carrying the day for Dutheil’s proposition.

“Yes! that’s it! Chavasse has hit it! Hurrah for Chavasse and his stomach!” were some of the cries that rose on every side.

The author of the amendment, suddenly raised aloft on a dozen shoulders, was, for a moment, in danger of making a triumphal progress through the courtyard.

Dutheil was calm and self-possessed, though manifestly well pleased with the success of his proposal.

“Gentlemen, there will be abundant time to decide how the fines shall be employed. What we have to do first, is to fix their amount. I propose ten centimes for each infraction of the rules, and fifty centimes in case of a repetition of the offence on the same day.”

“That is not enough!” shouted Chavasse, whose popularity had evidently turned his head. “At that figure, the best we could afford would be a dinner at the Palais-Royal. If we are to have a first-class spread, such as I have in mind, the fines must be made larger.”

“If they should be made larger, they might prove burdensome in some cases. The best way to swell the fund will be to maintain a strict surveillance, and see that each offender contributes his share. Even at ten centimes, the results obtained will be very gratifying. Among the Taupins, the average is twenty infractions a day, which gives two francs, and counting one second offence, two francs, fifty centimes; at the end of the year, even reducing the number of school days to 250, these figures produce a total of 625 francs. That is enough to provide a luxurious banquet, even after setting aside a large sum for charitable purposes, as I am sure we should all wish to do.”

“Good! good! Let’s adopt the Taupins’ plan! Vote! Vote!”

“Very well, then, we will proceed to vote. All those who are in favour of adopting the Taupins’ arrangement as it stands will raise their hand.”

Every hand went up.

“Now, all who are opposed — what, no opposition? Carried unanimously. Gentlemen, if it is your will, we will nail the regulations to the door of the library and from this time forth they will be rigidly enforced.”

The famous regulations which were to restore to Division No. 1 the era of peace and order did not produce exactly that result on the first day. We all seemed animated with a desire to see how often we could break the rules, the purpose being to incur a fine and swell the fund. There were constant trips to the library to take possession of the books, desk lids were violently slammed, there was an epidemic of coughing, noses were boisterously blown when there was no necessity —

The total collections were enormous. There were no less than sixty violations, and Dutheil, who had been made treasurer, took in the handsome sum of five or six francs, all in big copper sous.

But this excessive ardour cooled after a few days. Once the nucleus of the fund was formed, no one thought of increasing it, voluntarily, and every one was as careful not to incur a penalty himself as he was prompt to report the least delinquency of his neighbour. Eternal vigilance was the order of the day; the surveillance was not relaxed for a moment. No sooner had some unhappy youth heedlessly transgressed one of our Draconian laws than twenty vengeful voices were raised in a shout, “Fine him! fine him!” It made one think of a band of redskins in pursuit of their victim’s scalp. The only course for the unlucky culprit to pursue in such a case was to make the

best of it and pay the price of his peccadillo. An attempt to deny the fault, or even to argue the case, only made matters worse; the voice of the objector was immediately drowned in a chorus of oburgation.

There was one person in the school, however, who had every reason to rejoice at our innovation. That person was M. Valadier. Henceforth he might devote himself with a tranquil conscience to his unfortunate passion for *bouts-rimés*, for, thanks to us, his labour of surveillance had become a sinecure.

He was an odd character in his self-effacement, this shy, modest, bald-headed man, already beginning to show his years, and seeming to think of or care for nothing outside of his present extremely humble position. He had become a fixture in his usher's calling, which to others is a stepping-stone to something better or a purgatory; it seemed to him as natural as the air to the bird or the sea to the fish. The lycée was his rock, Division No. 1 his shell. There was a story that the principal one day having assigned him to other duties, M. Valadier knew no happiness until he was restored to his beloved class-room, his desk, and his straw-bottomed armchair.

He had contracted a bundle of queer habits which little by little had become to him as necessary as the air he breathed. For instance, he always used the stove in summer as a supplementary closet in which to keep his alpaca sleeves, a velvet skullcap and a pair of slippers that he put on at the beginning of every *séance*. The periodical return of the season when it became necessary to renounce this usurpation, and restore the stove to its legitimate functions as a heat producer, was an annually recurring sorrow to the poor man.

As for vacations, they were a period of protracted torture for him, and the only drawback to the pleasure he experienced at the reopening of the school was the prospect of seeing new faces in his room. But alas! there is no such thing as perfect happiness in this world, and the students in rhetoric really could not be expected to follow his example and become fixtures in the Lycée Montaigne solely in order to avoid disturbing the habits of their usher.

Another of his hobbies was to expatiate to us on the exceptional advantages of his position and endeavour to make proselytes to his doctrine. It could not be said of him that *he* was eternally grumbling at his lot! Nothing angered him so quickly as the discredit, entirely unjustified in his opinion, which the world attached to his functions.

"*Pion!* — One thinks he has said everything in saying, *Pion!* Well, for my part, I am proud to be an usher, I am content to be an usher, and I hope to remain an usher to the end of my days. You may just tell the imbeciles that, and inform them I said so."

Up to the present time the only thorn in the side of this philosopher had been the necessity of exercising surveillance over the students, and now the institution of the *cagnotte* had suddenly relieved him of this burden. Had he not reason to believe that he had reached the summit of earthly felicity?

As for us boys, after a week of experience we were not yet tired of our system of mutual persecution, although we had all paid frequent tribute to Dutheil's treasury.

All, however, with one exception — Thomereau! For a whole week the young rascal had escaped being caught transgressing. There were no more puns perpetrated in

study hours, the little notes no longer circulated furtively from hand to hand. Thomereau had all at once become the model of all the virtues. And what was more, no one had been so inflexible an agent in enforcing the rules, no one's conscience was burdened with the weight of so many fines inflicted upon others.

A fierce longing to be revenged began to ferment in the bosoms of the little community. Secret conclaves were held in the corners of the courtyard, measures were concerted that it was supposed must infallibly lead Thomereau to break the law.

Vain were all our efforts. He had sworn to go scatheless through the year, and was not to be caught in any of our carefully baited traps. He who had always been so noisy and inconsiderate now kept a strict watch on his every movement, never raised his eyes in school-time unless it was to swoop down on a delinquent, and, to state the case in a single word, was invulnerable.

And at recess he would turn the knife in the wound by saying, with a patronizing air :

“It is really awfully good of you fellows to chip in to give me a good dinner, to which I shall not have contributed a centime.”



CHAPTER VI.

LEGE QUÆSO.

I WAS now on easy terms with my new comrades and entirely at home in the Lycée Montaigne. There was one thing, however, that astonished me and, to tell the truth, humiliated me a little, which was the little attention I attracted in the midst of the class of eighty pupils. After the not very flattering remarks that my Latin theme had elicited, I had not been favoured with the least notice on the part of M. Auger. He seemed, in fact, to be ignorant that such a person as I existed.

Not only had it so chanced that he had never questioned me or called me up to explain a passage in our author, but the tasks to which I had given most pains were passed over without a word of comment.

And yet, in each class, it was the professor's custom to select ten or a dozen exercises and give his judgment of them, always with the candour and outspokenness that were so eminently characteristic of the man. Never once had my exercise been of the number.

What seemed to me still more strange and in a certain sense unjust was that day after day the themes of some of our number, particularly Dutheil and the head ones of the class, were carefully read, criticized, and dissected by the master's merciless scalpel.

What was the reason of this evident and apparently premeditated preference? I had heard that at Paris the professors are accustomed, as must necessarily be the case where the classes are so large, to bestow most of their attention on those students on whom they think they can count for success in the great university tripos. But I should never have believed that this species of favouritism would be carried so far as to entirely neglect talents of a more modest order.

“It is the sluggards and dullards of the class, on the other hand, who should be urged on and made to toe the mark,” I said to myself. “The others can get along without a master, at a pinch.”

Oppressed by the gravity of these considerations, I determined one day to go and see what Dutheil had to say about the matter.

He was, as I have said before, an affable and obliging fellow, of enormous application, and always very lucky at examinations, which gave him a consciousness of power; but at the same time there was nothing of the pedant about him, and he was not disposed to be secretive in regard to those small methods which are requisite for success.

I was much more attached to him than I was to Ségol, for instance, a great hulking fellow with a bull's neck and the head of a chimpanzee, who was so insufferably conceited, because he had taken a prize for Latin versification the year before, that there was no approaching him. There was nothing very extraordinary in this, it may be said, for during the last three or four years Ségol had devoted himself body and soul to this one specialty. He did nothing else, took no interest in anything else, had no other aim or object in life. To read and re-read the *Æneid*, not to admire its beauties, but to master its *tech-*

nique and increase his stock of images and epithets, to explore unceasingly the depths of the *Gradus* or of Quicherat's "Treatise on Latin Prosody," such was his sole mission here below. History, science, French or Latin eloquence, the beauties of Greek literature or those of the great English and German authors, physical exercises — nothing of all this was of the least value whatever in his eyes. The great, the only question was to know if such and such a Latin word was composed of two *shorts* or two *longs*, if it was capable of forming a dactyl or a spondee.

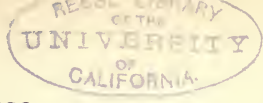
Latin versification certainly has its advantages, and far be it from me to belittle its importance. It occupies a place in all liberal education, and, whether as a simple intellectual exercise or a means to a more correct appreciation of the Latin poets, it would be difficult to find anything to replace it. But, after all, it is only a *hors-d'œuvre*, and an accessory; to make of it, as Ségol did, the *pièce de résistance*, or, rather, the sole dish of the classic banquet, seemed to me extremely ill - advised.

However, it was not so much this hobby of his that repelled me as his arrogant and egotistic air. And what attracted me in Duthiel, on the other hand, was less his almost universal superiority (except in mathematics) than the frankness and simplicity of his manner.

"Don't you think it singular," I said to him, then, that morning, "that M. Auger gives so much attention to your themes and constantly leaves unnoticed the exercises of so many other students? It seems to me that if I were in your place I should feel uncomfortable to be the object of so marked a preference."

Dutheil looked at me with surprise.

"I don't know what gave you that idea," he said. "M. Auger treats me no differently from the rest."



“What! is it not true that M. Auger has always some comment to make on your exercises?”

“I fail to see anything out of the way in that. It would be extraordinary, indeed, if he acted otherwise.”

Such assurance confounded me.

“But what would you say if you were in my place and had handed ten carefully prepared themes to the professor, all which were passed over in silence?”

“I should be greatly astonished. But such a thing appears to me hardly possible. Did it happen in your case?”

“Yes; it did. Every day I enter the class-room hoping to receive a word of praise or censure, a criticism, a mere remark. But there is nothing, and I am obliged to sit and look silly, without knowing whether I have done well or ill.”

“That is singular!” said Dutheil. “And you are always careful to write *lege quæso* on your exercise?” he added, after a moment’s reflection.

It was my turn to manifest surprise.

“*Lege* what?”

“*Lege quæso* — please read! What! you did n’t know? That is a good one, upon my word!”

And he gave way to a hearty fit of laughter.

“We always write *lege quæso* at the head of our theme, my dear boy, when we wish our production to be examined by the professor. You can see that it would be impossible to give an opinion every day on seventy-five exercises; such a labour would be beyond the powers even of a man of M. Auger’s ability! So many compositions are written without care or thought, simply to avoid punishment! It would be equally hard on the master and on the class to compel them to waste valuable time on such performances. It is no small task that he has to read them all in his hours of leisure, in order that his proper standing may be given

to each man. So recourse is had to an expedient. Every student who omits to preface his composition with the classic formula admits, *ipso facto*, that his work is poor, hastily prepared, and unworthy of the public recognition of the master, and that all that is asked for it is the silence and obscurity of an examination in private. On the other hand, he who has taken pains with his work, endeavouring conscientiously to produce the best that is in him, if he will but mark it with those two words, *lege quæso*, is certain to see it read, annotated, and criticized by a competent judge in the presence of the whole class. Do you not consider that a fair arrangement?"

"Perfectly fair, and you cannot imagine what a load you have taken off my mind," I said to Dutheil. "It was with the greatest reluctance, I assure you, that I accused M. Auger of partiality. He has such a candid, honest way with him!"

"There is no better man in all the world, as there is none more respected for his learning. It is an inestimable boon to have him for our professor, and some day you will see how we shall appreciate that advantage."

The veil had dropped from my eyes. Thenceforth I was possessed by a single thought, — to give the measure of my powers in a theme as good as I could produce, and at last secure M. Auger's opinion of my performance.

It so happened that on the following day we were to hand in a French composition, the subject of which was entirely to my liking :

"Alcuin submits to Charlemagne and his counsellors the necessity of establishing schools throughout the land."

French composition had been my strong point at Châtillon. Not only had I been awarded the prize of honour the preceding year, but on the occasion of a visit

to the lycée by an illustrious statesman who was making the tour of the department, I had been selected to deliver the address of welcome, and my "laïus" had had the honour of being printed in the *Guetteur de la Lèze*. I may say without vanity that the aforesaid "laïus" was considered a creditable performance, and, on the strength of this single specimen of my academic eloquence, several of my father's friends had urged him to select the bar as my career.

I flattered myself, therefore, that I was able to write four or five pages of French not wholly unworthy of M. Auger's approbation, and, fortified by the counsel that Dutheil had given me, I buckled down to my task with determination. At all events, I could depend now on being read and judged in accordance with my desert.

The incubation of my masterpiece occupied me no less than three hours. After I had adorned and beautified it, scattering through it with a lavish hand all the flowers of my imagination and all the graces of my style, after I had read and re-read it, and even carried it out to the courtyard to submit it to Verschuren's critical acumen (I thought he would be interested in the glory that must accrue to our common birthplace), I finally decided to make a fair copy of it in my very best chirography, and at the head of my production, opposite my name, I wrote the two fateful words.

At last I abandoned the fruit of my labours to its fate, and beheld it flutter away in company with the other leaves, first into the "correspondence basket," then to M. Auger's desk, and finally into his coat pocket.

To say that I was unmoved when, on the following day, the solemn moment came for the exercises to emerge from those same secret recesses would certainly be a wicked

untruth. Where is the conscript whose heart did not beat on hearing the cannon for the first time? However, the memory of my Châtillonian laurels sustained me, and with a slight modification of Bailly's words I might have said :

"I tremble, but it is with hope."

M. Auger reviewed one after another the papers of five or six of my comrades. He commended Dutheil's, and even read us a page or two of it that he considered particularly happy. With the others he was less tender.

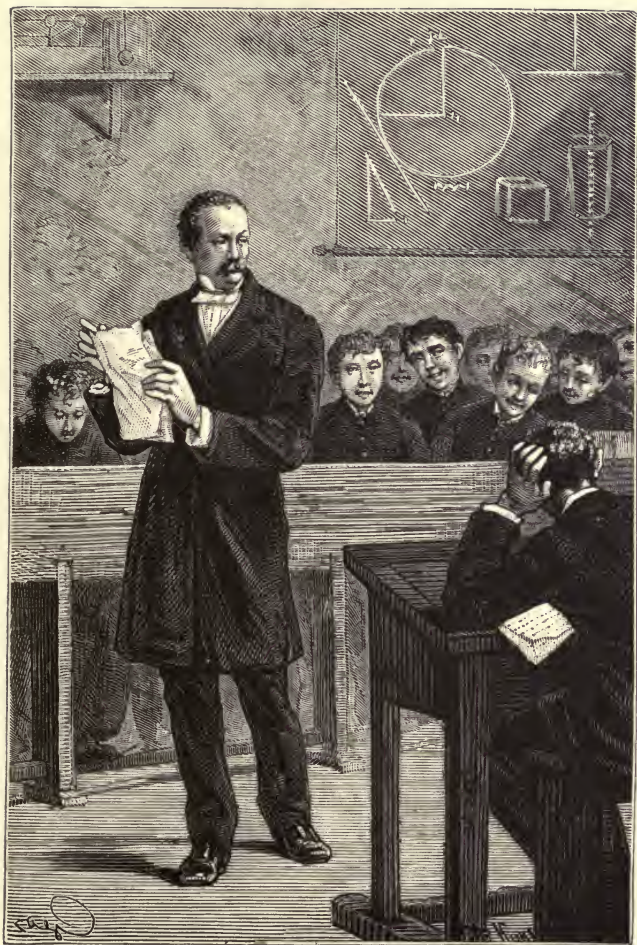
At last he reached my name.

"M. Besnard," he said.

A film passed across my eyes. All my blood flowed back on my heart. I was pale as a man listening to his death sentence.

"M. Besnard," the professor went on, "gives us to-day what the English call a maiden speech, a *discours d'essai*. I regret that I am unable to say, with Corneille, that this *coup d'essai* is a *coup de maître*. M. Besnard, I should be sorry to state if I were not here for that very purpose, does not seem to have formed a very clear idea of the kind of composition that was assigned him. He appears to think that, in order to perpetuate what is known in rhetoric as *Discours Français*, it is sufficient to string out in long array the more or less judicious ideas which present themselves to his mind and strike him as having some connection with the subject. He totally disregards the canvas given him to treat, and makes no attempt to develop it. The evil would not be so great if the elements he introduces had any real value, but the opposite is the case, except, perhaps, as regards one or two paragraphs.

"I cannot repeat too often, speaking in a general way, that it is best you should adhere closely to the subjects I



“AS FOR ME, I WAS DUMFOUNDED.”



give you to develop, the object being to form your minds to habits of logical deduction. When you are writing a historical narrative, for instance, it is permissible to give your imagination freer play, and adopt for your ideas the order that appears to you most attractive. The object of the exercise which we call *Discours Français* is simply to afford you a lesson in ratiocination reduced to its elementary terms, and to which you are to give only a natural expansion. The very disorder of the arguments used by M. Besnard shows what need his understanding has of such a training."

What words have I fit to express the torments of my little provincial vanity, while these criticisms, temperate as they were, were falling from M. Auger's lips? I was as red as a peony, and kept my eyes glued on my book so as not to encounter the, as I supposed, ironical glances of my schoolmates.

"As for the style—"

Here I breathed again. Having in that brief moment drained the cup of bitterness, I began to indulge the hope that there was something in the way of consolation awaiting me. And it was my style for which I had been most admired at Châtillon!

"As for the style," continued M. Auger, "it is at all times ordinary, and often incorrect. I have noted twenty instances—I will mention a few. There, for example, in the very first sentence, *the idea took me*. *The idea occurred to me* is what you should say; the former locution, although tolerated in colloquial conversation, is inadmissible in finished discourse. Elsewhere I find *brilliant lustre*, which is an evident pleonasm. Farther on I perceive *to advance forward*. It would be difficult to advance backward. These are venial errors, doubtless, but they produce a dis-

agreeable impression, especially when they are so numerous. Elsewhere Alcuin assures Charlemagne that the projected reform will be the 'brightest jewel of his crown.' Why not the brightest sword of his life? (Laughter.) Such forms of speech are pretentious, vulgar, and in bad taste, as are all metaphors that do not rest on truth and nature. M. Besnard has never seen them in Pascal, or Molière or Racine. He will do well to leave them where he found them, and confine himself to the forms of language consecrated by our great writers."

That was all. M. Auger took up the next exercise.

As for me, I was annihilated, and it was more than a quarter of an hour before I dared to raise my eyes to the class.

CHAPTER VII.

'ΑΝΆΓΚΗ.

IF I had had a little less vanity and a little more common sense, I should have seen at once that M. Auger's criticisms were perfectly reasonable and just; I should have told myself that it was his duty as a professor to impart them to me, and mine as a student to listen to them, and that, instead of resenting his salutary advice, I ought to be glad to profit by it.

Unfortunately for myself, it was vanity that got the upper hand in the conflict, and I foolishly decided that it was incumbent on my dignity to be very angry.

Right or wrong, I thought I had discerned in the master's kindly meant remarks an intent to ridicule my provincial education. It seemed to me that all Châtillon, and the department in which I had first seen the light, besides, had been insulted and derided in my person. I swore eternal hatred to my comrades for having laughed, forgetting that twenty times at least I had committed the self-same crime when it was another who occupied the stool of repentance. I did not stop to reflect that their merriment had had no bitterness in it, and that five minutes after the occurrence no one appeared to know what it was all about.

But I knew, and when the class was dismissed I could cheerfully have picked a quarrel with every member of it.

I could not disregard the evidence of my senses, however; I was forced to admit that no one paid the least attention to my threatening looks, and that the terrestrial globe had not ceased to revolve on its axis because my great effort had turned out a miserable failure.

But this public defeat, nevertheless, had a deplorable effect upon my disposition.

I began with a mental vow never again to write *lege quæso* at the head of my exercises. In that way, I said to myself, I shall no longer expose myself to the risk of seeing my literary defects and my Châtillonian style turned into ridicule.

On the other hand, the certainty that my themes would not be read presently induced in me a pernicious habit of slovenly and careless composition, as is apt to be the case when our duties are ungrateful.

No one can feel satisfied with himself who sits down and in a quarter of an hour dashes off, haphazard, a string of empty phrases, without rhyme or reason. That was the case with me; I was not happy, and my standing in composition was not calculated to restore my cheerfulness. Twelfth, fifteenth, eighteenth, such was now my usual number in the class.

A singular process was going on within my brain. I finally convinced myself that I had an unconquerable prejudice to contend with, and that the Parisian professors made it their business to impede the progress of scholars from the provinces.

“What use is there in working?” I said to myself. “Do what I may, I shall always be classed after those who have pursued their studies at Paris, and have acquired there that indefinable something without which success is impossible”—

The reasoning of a child! It would have been such a simple matter to set to work and ascertain just what was that undefinable something whose existence was revealed to me by a sort of instinct! But my preconceived notion was there and not to be got rid of; it continued to weigh me down like a veritable rock of Sisyphus.

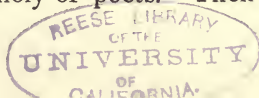
I became morose, melancholy, almost peevish. Mamma and Aunt Aubert, of course, noticed the change and inquired the reason of it. Foolishly again, I made a mystery of the matter to them; I found it simpler to deny my melancholy than to explain it.

I was a little more candid with Molécule, who questioned me discreetly on the same subject. Without confessing the real source of my woes (perhaps I might not have been able to tell exactly what it was myself), I hinted obscurely at their magnitude. I was, I informed him, "one of those unfortunate and accursed beings who are born with the brand of despair marked on their brow, and are doomed forever to drag after them the ball and chain of a hateful existence."

Those are the very expressions I made use of as I strode with great strides up and down the courtyard at his side, on a gloomy afternoon in autumn. In confirmation of my words I revealed to him that I had adopted as my motto the Greek word *Ἀνάγκη* (fatality), and proposed, as soon as the condition of my finances warranted such oriental luxury, to have the legend engraved on a seal of steel, the handle to be a death's head carved in silver.

Molécule was of all the world the one best calculated to comprehend me. He stopped in front of me and eyed me in silence for a moment.

"Friend, I know your complaint — I have suffered from it," he said. "It is the melancholy of poets. Their only



remedy for it lies in expectorating the scorn and disgust inspired in them by a coarse and vulgar world. Write verse; believe me, it is the only cure for you!"

Write verse! Of a truth, all my surroundings seemed to be in a conspiracy to drive me to that extremity. From M. Valadier, who never came up to the dormitory without having laboriously fabricated two or three dozen Alexandrines, to Molécule, who rhymed on everything and apropos of nothing, without mentioning Ségol and the other adherents of the Latin muse, all spoke to me of poetry. Was it possible that my friend was right and that I, too, was about to be visited by the divine afflatus?

At all hazards it behooved me to make the attempt.

I had scarce more than regained my room than I set to work. With the assistance of the dictionary of rhymes owned by M. Valadier, who was so kind as to dispense with it for an hour or two while he was filling up our weekly reports, I had soon concocted an elegy that exhaled the most funereal gloom. The title and initial lines will speak for it sufficiently. It was styled:

MALEDICTION!!!

and commenced in this way:

Ah! curst be the day when on thy *bitter* shore,
O Life, I was upheavèd by the wave of destiny!
Curst be —

There was a long string of violent imprecations, but of which it may be said that they were generally determined by the rhyme.

When I had put the finishing touches to this vengeful production, I made haste to copy it out on a clean sheet of glazed paper, and, after affixing my signature and adding

a flourish that resembled a crazy sky-rocket, I transmitted it to Molécule with a request for his opinion.

My emotion was almost insupportable while this eminent authority was acquainting himself with the contents of my missive. What would come of it? And what would be his verdict on my poetical abilities?

It surpassed my fondest hopes. Whether Molécule had learned by experience how indispensable is the bread of applause in the mouth of the poet, or whether he was sincere in his admiration, the note he sent me contained this one word :

“Sublime!”

and he had no more than clapped eyes on me in the playground than he hastened to assure me that I was destined to be “the greatest poet of my time.”

The expression struck me as rather emphatic, and I replied by disclaiming, rather feebly, any such aspirations on my part. But Molécule would not listen to me. I had the sacred fire, he declared, and that was the great point. My elegy was instinct, from beginning to end, with the fiercest indignation, and he doubted sincerely if the most illustrious of our poets had achieved anything superior, as a commencement.

Human vanity is boundless. Turgid and ridiculous as were these encomiums, they went straight to my heart. I looked on myself, in all honesty and good faith, as a genius of the first rank, and gave no thought to the matter when poor Molécule, impatient to reimburse himself for his outlay of admiration, immediately availed himself of the opportunity to communicate to me the seventh canto of his epic. His Alexandrines, unfortunately, were already beginning to appear feeble alongside

mine, or, rather, I had ears only for my own music. He must certainly have thought me cold.

From that day all my dreams were of poetry. *Malédiction* was succeeded by a satire aimed at a certain pedant whose crime was that he had not appreciated my literary talents at their just value, and whom, on that account, I devoted to the execration of posterity. I pictured to myself the derisive laughter of our remote descendants on learning how he had failed to recognize the great poet there was in Albert Besnard.

I was certainly far from imagining that these crude attempts of mine had absolutely nothing in common with genuine poetry except the more or less orthodox number of feet of which my lines consisted, and the tawdry, commonplace rhymes in which I dressed them. I believed in perfect good faith that poetry consists simply in the observance of certain mechanical rules and in monotonous assonances. Had any one attempted to tell me that it cannot exist without a profound knowledge of the language, reinforced by special genius and familiarity with the noblest models, I should have listened to him in utter stupefaction. We should laugh at a man who, knowing nothing of music, should attempt to compose an opera. Judge how much more difficult it is to detect and voice that secret harmony of words and thoughts whose very existence is unsuspected by the vulgar!

Be that as it may, I considered myself a poet, which possibly answered quite as well as if I were one, and gradually came to devote all my time to versifying. French composition, languages, dead and living, history, geography, all were henceforth neglected for my new passion. It was as much as ever that my mathematical studies retained a place in my life, obliged as I was to give



“THE FIRST DAY I STROLLED UP THE CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES
IN ALL THE GLORY OF MY NEW CLOTHES.”

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them a semblance of attention by my private lessons with M. Desbans. But as regarded all other matters, I was as much a stranger to the school as if M. Auger, M. Aveline, and our other masters had been so many Chinese professors, teaching, in a language unfamiliar to my ears, things that only the Celestials require to know.

The comparative independence enjoyed by the individual in a Parisian lycée, owing to the great number of pupils, was of assistance to me in this neglect of all my duties, and I abused it shamelessly. It was strange, but it never occurred to me that I was wronging both my father and myself by devoting the time at college which should have been given to my regular studies to other matters. And yet I should have known that my family did not subject themselves to the heavy expense of maintaining me at the lycée to have me lead an idle and useless life there. I should have seen how foolish it was to attend day after day courses in literature and history without doing my best to profit by them, and my common sense should have told me that among the cares and toils of after life the golden opportunity which I was so senselessly letting slip from me would never recur again. But no such reflections occurred to me. I believed I was a poet, and that was sufficient to close my eyes to the most elementary truths.

Another cause contributed to make me view with increasing indifference everything connected with the routine of the school, and that was my intimacy with Lecachey. I was in the habit of meeting him elsewhere than at the fencing school. The community of interests between his father and mine had been the means of broadening our relations. I had been invited to his house ; in his company I had been favoured with an occasional

glimpse of the elegances and luxuries of Parisian existence, and I had been a little dazzled. If Molécule had exerted an influence as deplorable as it was decisive on my intellectual evolution, Lecachey was responsible for a change no less marked in my external appearance.

Two ambitions now occupied my bosom, — to be at the same time a poet and a well-dressed man, and no one so completely realized my idea of what a well-dressed man should be as did Lecachey. The tranquil indifference with which he shook off the cares and annoyances incidental to his scholastic life, as a duck sheds water from its glossy back, constituted a charm the more. Seeing him sink the lycée so readily the moment he closed the door behind him, and followed the recitations *en amateur* without the ghost of a text-book before him, nonchalantly returning irrelevant answers to the questions which the professor occasionally propounded to him, I naturally arrived at the conclusion that he was the very embodiment of correct form.

This dandyism was carried to great lengths, for it extended even to contempt for the French language and the rules of orthography.

“Monsieur Lecachey,” Professor Auger said one day to my brilliant comrade, “it is not necessary to say *in this here moment*, but in this present moment; one does not *enjoy* a bad reputation, he simply *has* it; when you desire to say, he hurled his javelin, please write the word *jeta* with one t, not two. How happens it that you are in the rhetoric class and make such frightful blunders?”

At such moments I must admit that I did not admire my elegant friend. But maybe I did not make up for it on Sunday! I copied his trousers, his cravats. He had given me the address of his tailor, and my father had

allowed me to order a civilian suit, which I would put on as soon as I reached home from the lycée.

The Arc de Triomphe was scarcely high enough to let me pass under the first day I walked up the Champs Élysées in the glory of my new clothes.



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CHAPTER VIII.

THE VENGEANCE OF VERSCHUREN.

THERE existed in Division No. 1 a habit which had to some extent acquired the authority of law — the habit of shaving every Saturday preparatory to the weekly holiday. For this purpose a barber of the neighbourhood was allowed to set up a temporary shop in one of the class-rooms during the noonday recess, and all those who rejoiced in a semblance of whiskers were at liberty to resort thither and have their chin scraped.

More than one rhetorician whose hirsute appendages existed as yet only in prospective none the less considered it necessary to undergo the operation, under the fallacious pretence that it would accelerate the growth.

Of this number was Verschuren, whose eyes had never thus far been gladdened with the slightest vestige of a beard, but who, nevertheless, regularly every Saturday submitted his chops to the secular arm of our barber, M. Canonge.

This person, like a well-bred man acquainted with his business, never opposed the least objection. He even carried his Machiavellism so far as always to employ a thin, wiry razor that “scraped” as it ran over the smoothest chin, producing the impression that it was reaping a veritable forest of hair.

And the music rejoiced Verschuren exceedingly.

"It is astonishing how harsh my beard is getting," he would say. "Do you hear how the razor screams?"

"Yes, with agony," Thomereau replied.

Now and then M. Canonge would inflict a trifling wound on Verschuren's epidermis. You should see the delight with which the poor fellow would apply a little square of black court-plaster to the cut. And all day long, you might hear dialogues like this:

"Hello!" some one would say, "what's that Verschuren has on his cheek?"

"Oh, it's nothing—only a cut that awkward fellow Canonge gave me."

And we would turn our heads, and enjoy a quiet laugh. But he was destined to furnish us with more ample food for mirth.

There seemed to be times when he was not quite certain as to the reality of his famous beard; at all events, it was noticed that for some time past he had been making more frequent visits to his desk than was at all necessary. His face would be lost to sight for a moment, behind the protecting lid, to reappear presently, besmeared, as to the upper lip, with a colourless liquid resembling alcohol or water. Then, taking from his pocket one of those horrid little round mirrors set in pewter, that are sold in the three sous shops, he would proceed to make a minute examination of his features.

It puzzled us to know what to make of these manœuvres. We scented a mystery. In Verschuren's absence one day, Thomereau took it upon himself to institute a perquisition in the mysterious desk, and soon the *corpus delicti* was being passed from hand to hand, among the members of the class.

It was a bottle of *Capilline*, a preparation that was rep-

resented, on the label, to be a sovereign specific against baldness. Verschuren had evidently made use of it, in the hope of hastening the growth of his mustache.

“Not a word of my discovery, if you wish to enjoy a good laugh!” Thomereau enjoined on us.

The bottle, having completed the circuit of the class, was restored to its place in the desk. Verschuren returned, and suspected nothing.

It was all in vain, that, when recess came, we tried to make Thomereau give us an inkling of his project; not a word could be extracted from him. It is my belief that there was more than one of us who did not regard Verschuren's idea as such a bad one, and had secretly resolved to give *Capilline* a trial. After all, if the lotion restored the hair, why should it not be good for mustaches? was a question that was generally asked.

An argument that would have carried more conviction with it, if it had not rested on a false premise, to wit: that *Capilline*, and all the other wonderful preparations that are advertised so freely on the fourth page of the newspapers, so far from making the hair grow, have absolutely no other merit than that of transferring the coppers from the pockets of the ignorant and foolish to those of the inventor.

However, the excitement caused by the incident had subsided, and for some days past there had been no further talk of *Capilline*, when, on entering the refectory one morning, we were astounded to see Verschuren's lip adorned with a splendid pair of mustaches.

Miracle of miracles! Had *Capilline* done its work?

Alas! those mustaches were but a delusion and a snare; they were simply painted on the lip of the unhappy youth, after the fashion of those facial ornaments that street

urchins bestow on themselves at carnival time, with the assistance of burnt cork. I felt certain that it was one of Thomereau's practical jokes, and I am forced to admit that it struck me as very funny, although entirely inexcusable.

"It is idiotic!" I said to myself, laughing in company with the rest. "It will get Verschuren in trouble, sure. Wipe your lip," I murmured in his ear, as I passed his seat.

Verschuren, who had doubtless made an application of lotion before coming down to breakfast, blushed, and rubbed his lip with his handkerchief, but without producing any effect. The colouring was already dry, and appeared to have become set.

Surprised to see everybody looking at him and laughing, he took his mirror from his pocket, and proceeded to make a survey of himself. He was even more astounded than the rest of us.

"What is this?" he said, flushing crimson.

He moistened his napkin, and scoured away furiously at the unwelcome ornaments. It availed nothing; the colour seemed to have struck in and filled the pores of the skin.

Fortunately, his back was to the central alley, which separated the two rows of tables of the refectory, and the ushers who, as was their custom, were patrolling it, saw nothing of what was going on.

Verschuren was furious. He was too engrossed in his occupation of scouring his face with his napkin, to think of touching his breakfast.

Perceiving, at last, the futility of his efforts, he had resource to the expedient of covering his mouth with his handkerchief, as if he were bleeding at the nose, and mak-

ing a bolt for the courtyard. There we found him, his head under the pump, drenching himself with the ice-cold water, and fairly smoking with rage in the midst of all this deluge.

But the fatal mustaches were more intensely black than ever. They seemed to shine again under the vigorous friction of Verschuren's handkerchief. The best of the joke was that the victim, convinced that it was all owing to the potent influence of *Capilline*, did not dare complain.

We stood around him with an appearance of deep interest, making more or less generous remarks on his misfortune.

"He has cholera! —"

"Do you think it is catching?"

"The black seems to be spreading toward the ears —"

"The best thing he can do, is to go to the infirmary —"

"Oh, I do *hope* he will get over it!"

"Pooh! there is no danger, only, when a fellow has spots on the skin like those, there's no use trying to get rid of them."

Every one had his say. Thomereau alone kept himself in the background. As for Verschuren, he was pale with anger, and it would have been an immense satisfaction to him to thrash somebody; but whom could he tackle? He was so miserable that I took pity on him.

"It must have been that somebody put ink in the lotion," I whispered to him.

He saw by my air that I was not making sport of him.

"The lotion? — then they know? —"

"The whole class saw your bottle a week ago. It is Punch's secret now."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, very shamefacedly. "But it certainly is not ink," he continued, with a longer face than

ever. "If it were I should have noticed the difference, and there was no change in the colour of the lotion."

"Oh! oh!" I said to myself, "this begins to look serious. Can it be possible that Thomereau, the senseless idiot, has had recourse to some dangerous acid, perhaps a poison. See here," I continued, in an undertone, "promise me you won't be angry with the author of this piece of mischief, and I will help you to discover him."

"Not be angry? Ah! depend on it, he shall dance to music of my making if ever I lay hands on him. That miserable Thomereau was the man, I would n't be afraid to swear to it! I see him skulking yonder in the distance, afraid to come near —"

"Very well, do as you please. Only I shall have nothing further to do with the affair."

The menace had its effect.

"But you don't mean that I am not to pull the rascal's ears if it is he who has been amusing himself at my expense?"

"That is precisely what I mean. I do not say it to offend you, but, after all, the joke was not a bad one, and our comrade will be amply punished if we retaliate on him in kind. Give me your word not to make a mountain out of a mole-hill and I will promise you my assistance to be revenged."

"Very well! you have my word," Verschuren finally said.

"Then wait here for me."

I ran across the courtyard to Thomereau.

"Quick, not a moment's hesitation, or Verschuren will murder you! What did you put in his bottle?"

Thomereau was inclined to stand on his dignity and repudiate the insinuation.



“You will do best to tell me the truth ; unless you do Verschuren will take charge of the negotiations, and I assure you he won't stand on ceremony.”

“*Mon Dieu*, be easy, can't you? There's no necessity for making such a fuss. This is how it was. I simply dissolved a little nitrate of silver in the contents of the bottle. The colour of the liquid remained unchanged in the darkness of the desk and only turned black upon exposure to the light. I have a cousin who is acquainted with a photographer ; he explained the matter to me — ”

“It is well ; not another word.”

I hurried off to Payan, a Taupin with some knowledge of chemistry.

He held the position of assistant demonstrator, and in that capacity carried a key of the laboratory, with liberty of access at all times. I explained the matter to him. He laughed.

“A solution of hyposulphite of soda will remove the stain,” he said.

And he obligingly went and procured for me a small phial of the remedy.

A few moments later Verschuren was relieved of his mustachios, and also, I think, of his faith in *Capilline*.

He kept his word and did not speak a word to Thomereau of what had happened. But our poor devil of a punster had a presentiment that matters were not going to end thus, and nothing could be more comical than his looks of apprehension as often as he found himself in Verschuren's neighbourhood. The circumambient atmosphere seemed to him charged with kicks and cuffs. His gayety had departed ; he reissued none of his ancient puns, and still less did he think of putting new ones in circulation. However, after three or four days of mental torture, see-

ing no signs of danger on the horizon, he began to pluck up courage a little.

How little did he suspect that even then the hour of vengeance was about to strike!

It struck in the dormitory one night, about twelve o'clock. I had been sleeping soundly for two hours when I was awakened by a touch on the shoulder. By the feeble light of the night-lamp I recognized Verschuren bending over me.

"I have my lad," he said to me, in a low voice. "Just listen."

I sat up and lent my ear. Silence reigned throughout the room, unbroken save for a snore, resonant, regular, profound as the growl of one of the big pipes of a church organ.

"It is Thomereau who is snoring," Verschuren continued, "and to snore in the dormitory is a misdemeanor!"

We smothered our laughter as well as we could.

Two minutes later Dutheil, Chavasse, Molécule and Payan, aroused to serve as witnesses, were standing with us at Thomereau's bedside.

With mouth agape and distended nostrils the poor wretch was snoring away, unconscious of impending evil. A resounding slap awoke him with a start.

"Brother, no one may snore in the dormitory! Ten centimes fine!" said Verschuren, in an imposing tone.

"No one may snore in the dormitory! Ten centimes fine!" the rest of us chorused, in sepulchral accents.

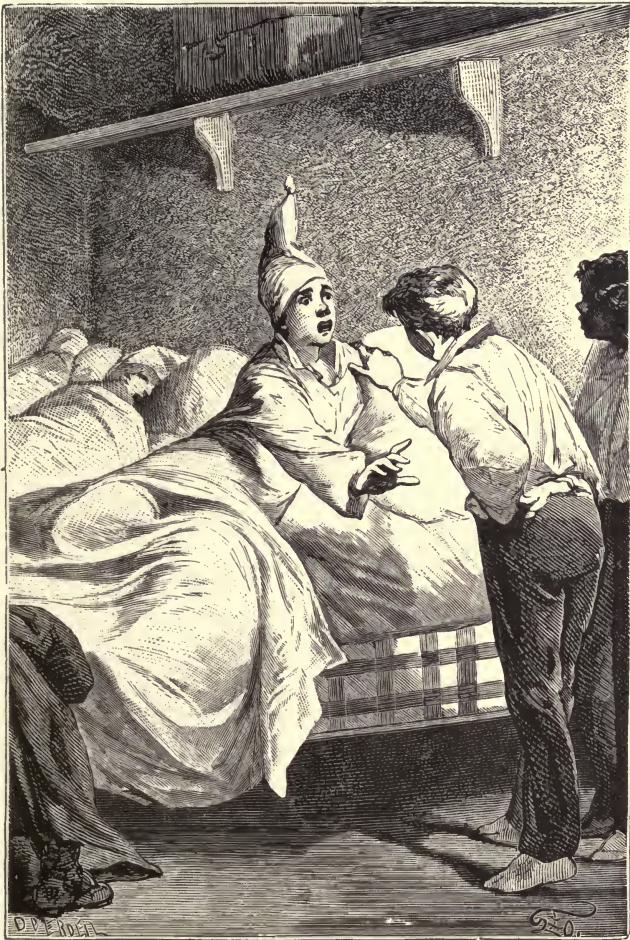
Thomereau looked at us with awe and wonder. But presently, taking in the situation :

"I suppose you consider it funny to wake me up in this way! *Mon Dieu!* you shall have your ten centimes," he grunted, and turned his back on us.

We had at last found the defect in his armour !

After that evening the unhappy youth never ventured to close his eyes until every one was asleep, and for a week or two he abstained religiously from practical jokes.

“And yet,” he said, every time that he was obliged to part with his two sous, “where should a fellow snore if not in the dormitory? I think that article should be expunged from the regulations.”



“ ‘ BROTHER, NO ONE MAY SNORE IN THE DORMITORY.’ ”

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CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE THE TRIBUNAL OF MOLIÈRE.

IT was Sunday. I had spent my afternoon driving with Lecachey in the Bois de Boulogne and had come in a few minutes late for dinner. My father always insisted on rigid punctuality in such matters; I found the entire family gathered in the drawing-room awaiting me.

As I was making my excuses while taking my place at table, I was struck by the expression of sadness that was visible on every face. My mother contemplated me with a sort of pained compassion. Grandpa seemed lost in his reflections, and shook his head occasionally while talking to himself. My father swallowed his soup without raising his eyes from the plate. And as for Aunt Aubert, there was no mistake about it, two big tears hung ready to drop from her eyelashes.

I was asking myself what might be the meaning of these diverse manifestations of a common sentiment, when my father undertook to afford me an explanation.

“My dear boy,” he suddenly spoke up, “why did you not tell us that you were not happy at the Lycée Montaigne? You surely know that you have no better friends than your parents, and that it is your duty not to withhold from them your cares and sorrows —”

Here mamma and Aunt Aubert burst out in sobs, and the aspect of the table became more than ever like a funeral banquet.

“If you have any reasonable objection to the studies you are pursuing,” my father went on, “you should confide it to us. We have no object save your happiness —”

“Yes, to be sure, your happiness,” Aunt Aubert vehemently interrupted, rising and moving rapidly around the table to cast her arms about my neck. “Poor darling! You are persecuted, aren’t you? They make your life miserable and you never say a word!”

I was literally dumfounded by this scene, and utterly unable to account for it on any reasonable hypothesis. Sunday was not usually one of my “blue” days, and these unforeseen condolences were entirely at variance with my prevailing mood on returning from the Bois. I could do nothing, therefore, but mumble confused protestations and denials.

“Really, now, I can’t imagine what has given you such ideas — Aunt Aubert, please, please don’t cry so. It is all a mistake, I assure you — an inexplicable misunderstanding —”

“Come,” said my father, a little sharply, “what use is there in denying what is true? I have been to the lycée for information, and I learned there that your standing in your classes is poor, that you neglect your studies, and that your reputation is that of an idle, lazy scholar. Now I know you well enough to be certain that underlying all this there is some mysterious disgust which you are concealing from us.”

By this time my face was blazing; I said not a word.

“Finally, if there were any room for doubt remaining,” my father concluded, extracting from his pocket a crumpled sheet of paper, “this copy of verses, found this morning by Aunt Aubert on the floor, where it had dropped from

the pocket of your tunic, would suffice to enlighten us as to your mental state. *Malédiction!!!* — that is its title.

“‘ Ah! curst be the day when on thy bitter shore,
O Life . . . ’”

“The poor child!” here cried Aunt Aubert, carried away by her indignation. “Seventeen years old, and already cursing life! Why, they must be vampires, and worse, those to whom we entrusted him!”

At this juncture the general emotion and the music of my own poetry acted on me with such sudden intensity that my feelings overcame me, and I mingled my tears with Aunt Aubert’s. Mamma’s and grandpa’s floodgates were also opened; the deluge was universal.

My father saw that it was time to try the effect of a diversion.

“If the verses only had a little merit!” he wearily said, suspending his reading; “but we have not even that poor consolation, alas! I think that in all my life I never saw such pitiable trash —”

I bounded like a horse at the touch of the spur.

“Moléculé thinks them good!” I rejoined.

“Moléculé doubtless has his reasons for saying so, my dear boy, but I am unable to share his opinion. Without going further than the first line, for instance, can you not see the absurdity of applying the epithet *bitter* to a shore of any kind, even the metaphorical shore of life? *Malédiction* is a rhapsody, don’t blind yourself to that fact, my lad. If you propose to employ your time at the Lycée Montaigne in composing verse of that calibre, my advice to you would be to resign at once and hire out as clerk in a grocery shop, where you can sell pound packages of the sugar of my manufacture.”

Brief as this little passage at arms had been, it had the effect designed by my father, that of diverting our ideas into another channel. Aunt Aubert and grandpa attempted my defence, and, disenchanted though they were, tried to make it appear that my poetry was not so black as it was painted. Mamma, comprehending how painful to my self-esteem the discussion was, and observing that I maintained a sullen silence, made a signal to the combatants to change the subject. The inquiry was resumed into the motives which had elicited from me such dreadful accents of despair.

That gave me control of the situation. With sulky perversity I absolutely declined to make any statement. It was all in vain that they tried to make me say why I, who had always been studious and obedient at Châtillon, now saw fit to take my place among the most irreclaimable dunces at Montaigne. I kept my mouth resolutely closed.

In the midst of these unpleasantnesses the dinner came to an end.

As soon as the dessert was disposed of, I pushed back my chair and rose, without saying a word.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" my father asked, with a suggestion of malice.

"I am going to put on my uniform and return to the lycée," I replied, with a great display of dignity.

"Ta, ta, ta — what's that you are giving us? And do you think it looks well to leave us in such a sulky frame of mind? In the first place, your time is not up yet, and then I had another project for this evening, — that you and I should pay a visit to the Comédie-Française. The plays are the *Misanthrope* and *les Précieuses Ridicules*. I would take you back to the lycée in the morning and straighten out matters with the authorities."

I was strongly inclined to be heroic and refuse this unexpected treat. But how could I! *Les Précieuses, le Misanthrope!* and I had been so long looking forward to the pleasure that was now offered me!

I thought that at all events I owed it to myself to counterfeit indifference.

"Very well; let it be as you desire," I said, resuming my place at the table.

"Oh! if my proposition is not agreeable to you, you have only to say so," replied my father, who was not taken in by my little comedy. "Perhaps, after all, you would prefer to return to the lycée? I don't know but it would be the best thing for you to do."

"There, don't torment the child," said mamma, as she poured our coffee for us, "and be off with you at once. You will need to hurry to get there for the rising of the curtain."

Dear little mother! how I could have hugged her for that speech! But my dignity would permit no manifestation. I remained glued to my chair in gloomy grandeur.

"Albert," my father suddenly said, "seriously, I do not desire your company unless it will be a pleasure to you."

There was a sort of implied doubt in his accents which went to my heart.

"Oh, father! you cannot doubt it," I warmly said, forgetful of my pose.

He looked at me with a tenderness in which there was less sadness.

"That is well," he replied. "And now, if you in turn wish to confer on me a very great pleasure, do you know what you will do? you will go and put on your uniform for the visit to the theatre, as you were about to do for

your return to the lycée. Call it a caprice if you will, but I love you better in the tunic. It seems to me you are more like my Albert, my dear little boy of yesterday, who is in such a hurry to be a man and cut loose from my authority."

"Nothing is easier," I murmured, a little discomfited. "Full uniform! your order shall be obeyed, sir. The proctor himself can make no objection if we should meet him in the corridors."

I ran up-stairs to my room to effect the transformation. Five minutes later we were seated in a licensed coupé and on our way to the Rue de Richelieu.

Upon giving the matter due consideration, I could not tell whether I ought to be pleased or angry. The prospect of an evening at the Comédie-Française instead of returning to the lycée was certainly agreeable. But I could not help thinking now and then of the verdict delivered on my poetry, and it seemed to me very harsh. How could I believe that Molécule, the author of an epic poem in twenty-four cantos, had been so grossly at fault as to the merit of my verse? My father's mind was probably prejudiced. Like all fathers, he did not wish to see his son embark in the career of letters, and his fears blinded him as to the beauties of *Malédiction*. Have not all great men had similar opposition to contend with? What poet was ever encouraged in his vocation by his parents?

Thus I communed with myself in my corner, while my father, equally silent, peacefully smoked his cigar at the other window.

But here we are, under the peristyle of the theatre, and without delay are ushered to our places in the fourth row of the orchestra. We have hardly time to cast a glance

around the house. The curtain rises, Alceste and Philinte appear upon the scene.

Laissez-moi là, vous dis-je, et courez vous cacher. . .

From the very opening speech the appropriateness and masculine beauty of the language laid hold on me and bore me away to the serene realms of classic art. Vanished, my anger and ill-humour! What ineffable delight to hear from the lips of the best actors in the world those clear-cut lines that had been familiar to me since childhood! I did not listen, I drank them in. My memory recited them within me before they were spoken, and, so to speak, prompted the actor who occupied the stage.

And now Oronte appears behind the footlights. Ah! ah! a coincidence I had not thought of! He, too, is an amateur poet, and his sonnet has been the means of getting him into a scrape almost exactly similar to mine. Is it possible that my father could have had the nefarious design to —? I look at him out of the corner of my eye. He is cool as a cucumber, and to all appearances wholly absorbed in the action of the play.

Oronte reads his sonnet. A question — Can it be that I am as absurd as he when I communicate my inspirations to the public? Yes, alas, and probably a great deal more. Oronte is a man of the world, and his manners are perfect. I am but an ill-licked cub of a schoolboy. Oh, my illusions! It seems to me that I see myself imaged there on the boards in one of those spherical mirrors that reproduce in distorted shape all one's deformities.

PHILINTE.

Je n'ai jamais ouï de vers si bien tournés.

Molécule, *parbleu!* It is Molécule in person.



ORONTE.

Vous me flattez et vous croyez peut-être. . . .

PHILINTE.

Non, je ne flatte point. . . .

ALCESTE.

Et que fais-tu donc, traître ?

Can it be possible that Molécule's object in praising my poetry was simply to be "paid in the same coin?" The thought is horrible. Now it is Alceste's turn :

ALCESTE.

*Monsieur, cette matière est toujours délicate
Et sur le bel esprit nous aimons qu'on nous flatte.
Mais un jour à quelqu'un dont je tairai le nom,
Je disais, en voyant des vers de sa façon,
Qu'il faut qu'un galant homme ait toujours grand empire
Sur les démangeaisons qui lui prennent d'écrire ;
Qu'il doit tenir la bride aux grands empressements
Qu'on a de faire état de tels amusements ;
Et que par la chaleur de montrer ses ouvrages
Ou s'expose à jouer de mauvais personnages. . . .*

These terrible truths fall on my devoted head with the crushing effect of so many blows of a bludgeon. I am as red as if the whole house knew that it was on my miserable back that the lash of the satirist was descending. But that is not all.

*. . . Quel besoin si pressant avez-vous de rimer,
Et qui diantre vous pousse à vous faire imprimer ?
Si l'on peut pardonner l'essor d'un mauvais livre,
Ce n'est qu'aux malheureux qui composent pour vivre.
Croyez-moi, résistez à vos tentations. . . .*

I am dead, excoriated, flayed alive. And the anger of Oronte !

ORONTE.

Et moi, je vous soutiens que mes vers sont fort bons !

What I said of mine, almost word for word ! And the entire house is bubbling with laughter. The worst of the business is that I am forced, in spite of myself, to join in the universal merriment, although I cannot help thinking that the laughter is intended for me.

As for my father, he mercifully refrains from looking at me. I am unable to express my gratitude for his forbearance.

Ugh ! At last the horrible scene is ended. The curtain falls on the first act.

“ I like M. ——— extremely in the rôle of Oronte,” my father observes. “ He acts with perfect naturalness, and his pained surprise when Alceste tells him some unpleasant truths is exceedingly comic.”

I would like to say a word or two in reply, but cannot compass it. I am as if crushed, annihilated. A great convulsion has occurred within me, and all my strength is gone. The three raps are heard behind the curtain, fortunately, and the second act begins. That is the usage at the Théâtre-Français, when classic plays are acted. The entr'actes are only of sufficient length to permit the necessary changes in the scenery, which is generally extremely simple. I like the custom ; it is in harmony with the respect due to the masterpieces of our national literature, and the spectator's interest in the play is not allowed to cool. Watch him, and see how heartily he applauds, how he enters heart and soul into the fable of the poet, how he identifies himself with the hero !

In the mood that I was in, this uninterrupted flow of brilliant repartee and elegant periods did me more good

than I can tell. The sufferings of my wounded vanity were gradually alleviated. I yielded myself to the charm of the simple and logical action, I gave myself up to the soothing influence of the harmonious verse. The dénouement came like the entrance of a stately ship into her haven. As the curtain fell for the fifth time on these words of *Alceste*,—

. . . *Et je m'en vais chercher un endroit écarté*
Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté,

it seemed to me that I was emerging from another life and returning to myself, after having been successively *Alceste*, *Philinte*, *Oronte*, *Acaste*, and *Clitandre*.

“Well, how did you enjoy it?” asked my father.

“Was n't it magnificent!” was all the answer I could make. “What a pity that that is all!”

“But that is not all. There is the *Précieuses Ridicules* to come yet —”

The joyous laughter there was this time when the curtain rose on the dwelling of old man *Gorgibus*, and how one almost seemed to see the sparkle of the wit as the good things fell thick and fast from the lips of *Mascarille*! I entered into the spirit of the performance with such zest that it did not occur to me to apply to myself a certain passage that fitted my case only too accurately:

MASCARILLE:—Such as you see me, I dally a little with the Muse, when I feel disposed that way, and you may see circulating in the boudoirs of Paris, written by this right hand, two hundred songs, as many sonnets, four hundred epigrams, and more than a thousand madrigals, to say nothing of portraits and enigmas.

MADOLON:—I must tell you that I just dote on portraits; I think there is nothing more gallant.



"SOMETHING IN ME SEEMS TO HAVE GIVEN WAY."



MASCARILLE:—Portraits are difficult; they call for great perceptive powers. You shall see some after my manner that will not offend your taste.

CATHOS:—I am awfully fond of enigmas, for my part.

MASCARILLE:—They sharpen the understanding, and I made four this very morning which I will give you to decipher.

MADELON:—Madrigals are agreeable, when they are ingeniously turned.

MASCARILLE:—That is the very thing I most excel in; why, I am at work now putting the entire Roman history into madrigals!

All that reads charmingly, as I had long been aware. But how differently it sounded from the lips of the consummate artists whom I had before me! As interpreted by them, the lines breathed a drollery, a subtlety, a profound philosophy whose existence had hitherto been unsuspected. I laughed; I laughed until I thought I should never leave off, and at the same time I was conscious of a certain feeling of respect. I was not tempted to contemn that which gave me pleasure, as is so frequently the case. When the cudgels began to play and the blows fell hot and heavy on the backs of Mascarille and his friend, Jodelet, I felt a personal grievance against those great boobies, Lagrange and Ducroicy, for breaking up such a charming dance and interrupting so brilliant a conversation.

But now the end was really come. It was nearly midnight, and time for us to be thinking of home and bed.

“What do you say to walking as far as the Cours-la-Reine?” my father proposed to me. “A bath of fresh air won’t do us any harm after being shut up so long in that sweat-box.”

The gas-lamps stretched away before us in long perspective as we pursued our way down the Rue de Rivoli and

the Champs-Élysées. The influence of the various emotions I had so lately undergone remained with me, and made me silent, and my father, who had always cherished the deepest veneration for our great comic poet, was no less moved than I. It was not until we reached the Palais de l' Industrie that the silence was broken.

“Well,” my father suddenly said, “do you think that upon the whole your evening has been as pleasant as if you had spent it with your friend Lecachey?”

“Oh, father! how can you ask me such a question? You know very well that I shall never have a dearer friend than you —”

I had taken his hand, and, walking by his side, I squeezed it as I had been used to do when a little child. The warmth and spontaneity of the impulsive action pleased him. He responded to my clasp and walked on a little way, in silence. Then, pursuing his train of thought :

“I do not doubt your affection, my dear son, and God grant I may never be obliged to do so,” he said, with a gravity that impressed me. “But you must admit that for several Sundays lately you have neglected us a little, and have gone outside in quest of distractions less wholesome than those you find in the bosom of your family. Unfavourable reports reach me from various quarters of your comrade, Lecachey, —you will tell me that it was I who was the means of bringing you together; I have discovered since that it was not the best thing I might have done. The more I see of his family the less I like their ways and mode of life. I am told that all the young man thinks of is racing, horses, and betting. If he attends the classes of the lycée, my informant added, it is more for the name of the thing than with any desire to profit by the instruc-

tion that is dispensed there. He is eighteen years old and has not even his bachelor's diploma —”

“And that is not the worst, for it is extremely doubtful if he has it when he is nineteen,” I could not help remarking.

“It is too bad,” my father went on, “and I cannot applaud myself for having once recommended such a companion to my son. I have sometimes thought that it was a real misfortune for you that you and Baudouin should ever have been parted.”

“Oh, how true that is!” I cried, effusively. “I was so accustomed to share with him my tasks, my pleasures, my most secret thoughts, that I feel a sense of incompleteness now he is no longer with me. He was my strength, my joy, my living conscience! So honest, so brave, so good, so sensible! Ah, friends like Baudouin are scarce, and now that I have lost him I feel how necessary he was to me!”

“My dear boy, I am pleased to see you appreciate your friend in accordance with his desert, but permit me to call your attention to the confession of weakness implied in your words. Is it manly to give way to discouragement and subside into inactivity because the comrade whom you looked up to as an example and support is no longer with you? Because you can no longer exchange with him that commerce of emulation and mutual good offices which had become a second nature to you, should you abandon yourself to the hazards of a vulgar intimacy with a lazy, worthless blockhead? It is in your own sentiment of duty, in the knowledge of what you owe to your family and to yourself, that you should look for strength to enable you to follow the right path.”

Here my father paused to hail a passing coach, the driver of which undertook to transport us to Billancourt.

“I acknowledge the justice of all you say,” I said, as I took my place in the coupé, “and I promise, my dear father, to heed your words of warning. But how much easier it was to tread that right path of which you speak in company with Baudouin!”



CHAPTER X.

APPROACH OF AUTUMN.—CAN I BELIEVE MY EYES?

THE weather had been growing perceptibly colder for some days past, and on returning to the school-room one morning after the ten o'clock recess, we were agreeably surprised to find a fire lighted in the stove.

Anselme, the attendant who had presided over this delicate operation, was a favourite with all hands. He had lingered to receive our thanks, and when we came trooping in from the playground with a collection of beautifully blue noses, was standing erect in the middle of the room.

"A fire! a fire!" was the intelligence that immediately spread through the ranks.

"Anselme, that was a glorious idea!"

"Bravo, Anselme!"

"Three cheers for Anselme!"

"Messieurs, I propose that we vote Anselme has deserved well of the country!"

The good fellow, delighted with this annual demonstration, which he prized as highly as if it had not been repeated by some fifteen or twenty previous generations of students, was laughing and showing all his teeth, when suddenly his honest satisfaction was frozen by a shriek of anguish.

It was from Molécule that the shriek proceeded.

“My papers!—What have you done with what was in the stove?” he faltered, in a voice that was hardly articulate, addressing Anselme.

“Faith, I laid M. Valadier’s skull-cap, slippers, and alpaca sleeves upon his desk,” the poor fellow contritely answered, “but as for the papers you speak of, I looked at them and saw they only contained poetry, so I used them to light my fire—”

“Wretch!—my epic poem!—nine whole cantos that only yesterday I confided to M. Valadier!” Molécule feebly murmured, reeling under the dreadful blow.

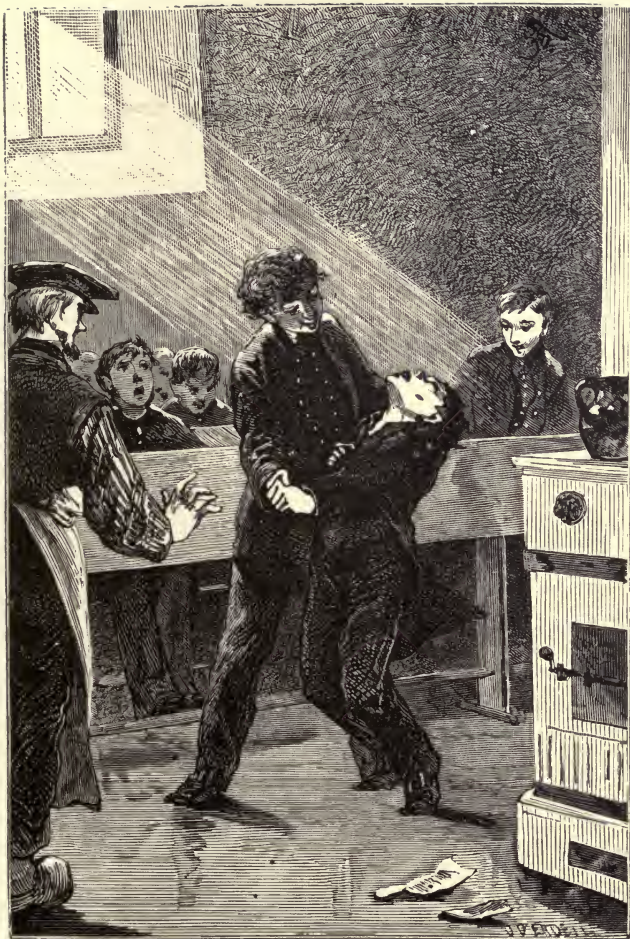
He tottered on his little legs, and I feared he was about to fall in a faint. But suddenly, his rage overmastering him, as if under the impulsion of a spring, he hurled himself on Anselme, and caught him by the throat.

“Speak, brute! Vandal! Omar of modern times! You cannot have burnt all! Speak: where is the rest?”

“*Mon Dieu*, monsieur, I am awfully sorry,” said the poor man. “But the kindling wood was damp, you know, seeing as how we have to keep it in the cellar, and it took me more than half an hour to get the fire started. And when I looked and saw the poetry, I thought it must be somebody’s old exercise, and then I used it. Oh!” he suddenly exclaimed, rummaging in his pockets, “perhaps there may be some little of it left—”

A ray of hope rose to Molécule’s despairing eyes.

Anselme consumed as much as two or three minutes in going through his clothes. He produced, successively, a fragment of newspaper, a knife with a buckhorn handle, a box of matches, a calico pocket-handkerchief, a ball of twine, a lamp-wick, some steel pens, an extraordinarily greasy pass-book, two or three nails, a short pipe, admi-



“MOLÉCULE'S LITTLE LEGS GAVE WAY BENEATH HIM.”

rably coloured, an india-rubber tobacco pouch, a bunch of keys, and finally a bundle of letters.

“Those are letters from the folks at home,” he said, replacing the bundle in his pocket.

The search began afresh, and resulted in the exhumation of a small volume entitled “Cook-book for Every Day in the Year,” a pack of playing cards, a brass thimble, and a corkscrew. There was no vestige of the lost epic, however.

“Ah! what a stupid ass I am!” exclaimed Anselme, smiting his forehead.

He plunged his hand into the capacious pocket of his blue apron, and this time brought to light two or three sticks of kindling wood, a half-burned faggot, and a sheet of writing-paper, all torn and rumped.

“Ah!” he said, triumphantly, “I knew there must be a little bit of it left somewhere!”

And sure enough, on the scrap of paper, traced in Molécule’s most superlative writing, were the words: END OF CANTO VII.

“All doubt is at an end! the wretch has destroyed the fruit of my midnight labours!” cried the unhappy author.

He had dropped upon a bench, and was holding his head in his hands in an attitude of poetic despair.

“O Camoëns!” he murmured, “to thee, at least, it was given to preserve thy manuscript from the wreck, holding it aloft above the raging billows, while thou didst swim to land! But my calamity, what tongue or pen shall describe it! Avenging Furies, what punishment shall be meted out to the obscure myrmidon, the odious *famulus* who wounded me in all that I had dearest?”

Molécule had risen to his feet.

“Yes, I will be avenged!” he roared, striding up to Anselme. “I will nail you by the ears to the pillory of history! I will vomit my burning indignation in iambics that shall devote your memory to the execration of future ages! Your abhorred name shall be written in company with that of Erostratus. I will hale you before the judgment seat of posterity!”

Anselme, terrified by these imprecations, whose meaning was not clear to him, but which by their vehemence acted only the more strongly on his impressionable nature, had gradually backed away toward the door. He now made a precipitate rush through the convenient exit, and disappeared in the corridor, thus, by flight, saving himself from the immediate consequences of his crime. Such a display of pusillanimity brought a smile to Molécule’s lips. His fury gave way to contempt. Drawing his snuff-box from his pocket, he refreshed himself with a high pinch, which appeared to exert a beneficial influence on his nerves.

M. Valadier immediately took advantage of the cessation of hostilities, to beat a loud tattoo with his penholder on his desk, thereby ordering us to our places, for we had all remained grouped in the middle of the room, amazed witnesses of the tragic scene.

This call to order, modest as it was, had an unforeseen effect on Molécule, by directing his wrath against M. Valadier.

“After all, it was wrong in me to be angry with Anselme,” he said, in a voice thick with passion. “Anselme is but the object, and, doubtless, unconscious instrument of some atrocious scheme of envy. A question that history will have the right to ask is, what motive could have induced the man who had possession of my manuscript to

place it in a stove! A strange receptacle for papers, one would say! And if it shall be proven that the man who did this thing was a broken-winded poet, a starveling rhymester, an author without readers, what is the construction that will be placed upon his conduct?

Here M. Valadier's few remaining hairs could be distinctly seen to rise in horror, and stand erect upon his head.

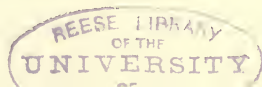
"That is a base and odious insinuation!" he cried, with the indignation of calumniated virtue, "an insinuation that I cannot allow to pass unchallenged. Every one knows that it has long been my custom to make the stove a receptacle for such things as there was not room for in my desk. But we will delay further explanations, until a more suitable moment. To your tasks, young gentlemen!"

A second tattoo on the arm of his chair emphasized this discourse, probably the longest that M. Valadier had ever uttered in his life. Quiet was gradually restored, the whispers subsided, and every one settled down to his work, while poor Molécule sat holding his head in his hands, the picture of despair.

At the end of a quarter of an hour or so, he gave signs of life, and I saw him scribble a note, which was presently handed to me.

"I have a favour to ask of you," it said. "You mentioned to me one day that you intended to take the word *'Ανάγκη* as your motto. I want you to relinquish it to me, for it is to me, alas! that such a motto is now particularly appropriate."

"It gives me the more pleasure to grant your request," I immediately replied, "that I had determined to sever my connection with both poetry and despair. It is a bargain, therefore — *'Ανάγκη* is your property."



This sacrifice appeared to alleviate Molécule's suffering a little. He proceeded to write the word, the right and title to which I had abandoned to him in perpetuity, at the head of a blank page, and made it the subject of his iambs. He was evidently desirous to strike while the iron was hot, and not let his indignation have time to cool.

At the noonday recess M. Valadier, still smarting under the imputation that Molécule had cast upon him, insisted on convoking a jury of honour. Dutheil and I were endeavouring to appease his honourable susceptibilities and make him understand that no one attached the least importance to the words of our embryo poet, when suddenly I felt two big hands laid on my eyes.

"Come, Thomereau, let up on your monkey tricks!" I said, as I struggled to release myself, convinced that it was the chartered buffoon of the school I had to deal with.

The two hands were removed. I turned about. How shall I express my stupefaction?

Baudouin stood before me.

A cloud passed across my eyes. I thought they must be deceiving me.

But I could not for long deny the evidence of my senses. That tall young fellow in the well-worn uniform of the Châtillon Academy, with brawny shoulders and a pair of enormous side-whiskers — that robustious youth who stood regarding me with such frank and friendly eyes and laughing at my discomfiture — was indeed Baudouin, Jacques Baudouin, the original and only Baudouin.

I commenced, naturally enough, by throwing my arms about his neck.

After that came the exclamations.

"Well, I never! Who would have thought it! There was a surprise — a famous good one! Just give me a

pinch, will you, that I may know I am not dreaming — ”

And next the questions :

“ What miracle was the cause? What sudden decision ? ”

“ This letter will tell you all,” Baudouin finally said, when he was given a chance to breathe.

He handed me a folded sheet of paper that he took from his pocket. I instantly recognized my father's handwriting. Regardless of my inquisitive comrades who had come and formed a circle round us, I hurriedly perused the letter, which was addressed to Baudouin. This is substantially what it said :

“ MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND :—I am going to ask from you, in Albert's name, a very great sacrifice, nothing less than your freedom. You are at Bourgas, I hear, with your excellent mother, and have not yet made up your mind as to a profession. I ask you to defer your decision for the present and go and spend a supplementary year with my son at the Lycée Montaigne. You need not worry over the material aspect of the question; I will be responsible for your expenses, and if you insist on it you can reimburse me some day when your labours shall have made you independent. I assure you that in case you accept my proposition it will be I who shall be your obligee. Your friendship for Albert has always exerted so wholesome and beneficial an influence over him that I should not hesitate to make much greater sacrifices to ensure him its continuance. Do not then, I pray you, look at my proposition in any other light than its true one, which is, on the one hand, to secure your companionship for my son, and on the other to facilitate the completion of your classic studies by giving you the inestimable advantage of a year of rhetoric at Paris. It will not be your mother who will raise objections, of that I am very certain. From what I know of her love and devotion for her son, she will appreciate the immense advantage that must accrue to you in every way from this additional year of study. So, let me hope that there may be nothing to prevent the accomplishment of the plan which I submit to you,— and if there is not, please do not even give yourself the trouble to answer

this, but get on the train and come straight to us at Billancourt. Two hours later you will be at Albert's side.

"Yours most faithfully,

"J. B. BESNARD."

"You don't suppose that I needed to be asked twice!" Baudouin added, by way of commentary, when I had finished reading the letter. "I answered your father by wire accepting his generous proposal, and set out immediately. I had meant to notify you of my coming, but on second thought I concluded it would be better fun to tumble in on you unawares, like a brickbat from the chimney. And here I am! Mamma was n't altogether pleased, though. She had counted on keeping me with her indefinitely, and was already beginning to talk of having me superintend the harvesting operations next season. But she is never wanting when a sacrifice is to be made, so she gave her consent and wrote a letter of thanks to your father. As for you and me, our initial harvest shall be laurels!"

"Hum!" said I, rather dubiously, "the season for laurels is over, here; at all events they are more difficult to gather than at Châtillon-sur-Lèze."

"Good! you are probably going to tell me that these Parisians can whip you in Latin Composition!" Baudouin replied, who had unlimited faith in my literary abilities.

"Whip me! Do you know what my standing in the class was yesterday? Eighteenth! And they are not all Parisians, either, who are ahead of me. There are fellows from Rouen, Grenoble, and Bordeaux; there is one from Chartres and another from Béziers —"

"You don't tell me — from Béziers, now?" Baudouin interjected, incredulously. "Well, you'll never make me

believe but that if a man from Béziers outranks you it is your own fault !”

I was about attempting to combat this geographical prejudice when Dutheil came up to us.

“ You must really make Molécule understand how wicked and absurd his conduct is,” he said, apologizing for intruding on our conversation. “ You are the only one he will listen to, and M. Valadier is really feeling very badly over the foolish business.”

“ *Mon Dieu*, I shall be only too glad if I can be of any service,” I said, having first introduced Baudouin and Dutheil to each other. And at the same time I signalled Molécule to come and join our party.

Like the rest of our comrades, he had watched with extreme interest the reception accorded to the new arrival. He came forward, therefore, without having to be invited twice. I at once put him in good humour by presenting him to Baudouin, with a glowing eulogy of his poetic talent. That naturally afforded an opportunity of relating the terrible calamity that French literature had suffered in his person.

Baudouin, who had a spice of malice in his composition, saw at once where the shoe pinched our little man. He followed my lead, chousing my sentiments, deplored the accident much as he might have bewailed the destruction of the *Iliad*, and played his part so well that in less than ten minutes the delighted Molécule had promised to dedicate his forthcoming poem to him.

“ Well, now,” I said to Baudouin at this juncture, “ I’ll bet you cannot guess what notion this young man of genius has taken in his head ? ”

“ What do you allude to ? ” asked Molécule, rather anxiously.

“He has conceived the idea that his manuscript was burned intentionally, from spite, and whom do you think he accuses of such a turpitude? Why, M. Valadier, our usher, whom you see standing over there, a most worthy man, and himself a poet.”

“Faith, I can understand perfectly that such an idea should have presented itself to monsieur in the first moment of his surprise and grief,” Baudouin replied, with the utmost seriousness. “There is nothing extraordinary in that. In such hours of trial one is inclined to suspect the whole world. But it would be a great surprise to me if a man of feeling, as a true poet cannot help but be, should hesitate a moment, after his first angry impulse had spent its force, to acknowledge his mistake and tender a fitting apology.”

Molécule had bowed his head under this indirect reproof. He recognized its justice, for he was naturally good-hearted, and had more vanity than malice in his make-up.

“Well,” he suddenly spoke up, “it shall not be said that I was wanting to my duty. I will go this instant and make my excuses to M. Valadier, — and before the whole class, too!”

He was as good as his word, like the brave little man he was. As for poor M. Valadier, tears stood in his eyes under their bristling brows.

And thus it was that Baudouin’s first appearance at the Lycée Montaigne was marked by a good action.



CHAPTER XI.

THE MUSEUM OF THE LOUVRE.

“**T**HERE, be off with you, and go and have a look at Paris!” my father said to us after breakfast on the morning of the first Sunday succeeding Baudouin’s arrival.

It was not necessary to repeat the command.

It was a gray day but dry — such weather as invites to walking and physical activity. We followed the high road until we came to the Point - du - Jour, where we turned off and regained the bank of the Seine.

One of the little omnibus steamers that ply on the river came along just then ; we jumped aboard. Baudouin was delighted, and I no less so. The air was cool, a nipping little breeze fluttered the rag that floated at the diminutive craft’s stern as if it had been a real flag. The screw revolved with its regular chug - chug. By straining the imagination a little we might have thought we were aboard a blue water ship, coming into harbour after a long voyage. There were few passengers on deck ; at that hour the current of excursionists was setting from Paris, not returning to it.

Baudouin continually plied me with questions which I was only too delighted to answer.

“What is that dome yonder ?”

“The dome of the Invalides.”

“And that huge edifice of iron and glass?”

“The Palais de l’Industrie. Then come the Quai d’Orsay, the Palais Bourbon, the Obelisk towering above the Place de la Concorde, which is invisible to us, and last of all, the Louvre.”

Scarcely has the magic word passed my lips when Baudouin cries :

“The Louvre ! Is it open to visitors to-day ?”

“Certainly.”

“Then let us go ashore. Come, make haste ! I have been aching this ever so long to see its contents.”

The puffing little steamer makes her landing. We cross the gang-plank ; here we are on the quay, here are the Gate of the Lions and the great court of the Carrousel.

“The Museum ?”

“To the right, messieurs, those steps that you see yonder.”

Baudouin does not walk, he runs. Before he has even climbed the steps he is quite pale with emotion and delight.

We pass rapidly through the vestibule, with its noble gallery of statuary.

It is very fine, but we will not linger ; let us ascend the grand staircase without turning to look behind ; let us not be seduced by the terra-cottas of the Campana collection, and hasten on to the hall of the Seven Chimneys

“You must have been here before, you are so well acquainted with the localities !” I cannot help remarking to Baudouin.

“I ? You well know that I have not. But for the last six days I have been studying the plan of the Louvre in my guide-book —Hush !—there are Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* and *Wounded Cuirassier* !”

“How beautiful! What strength!”

It is I who hazard that remark; Baudouin's feelings are too deep for utterance. He stands there with dilated eyes and teeth closely set, admiring with all the strength of his being, drinking in deep draughts of the terrible poetry that exhales from those two wondrous pictures.

Meantime I am observing the cheerful wood fire burning on the hearth, the perfect order and arrangement of the room, the liveried guardians with their grave and diplomatic air, all those sumptuous accessories that constitute a setting worthy of the great works of art. But as for him, he sees only the pictures, one canvas at a time, a canvas that *punctures the wall*, as he expresses it.

After the Géricaults it is Girodet's *Deluge*, that cluster of human beings clinging desperately to a breaking branch; it is his touching *Atala at the Tomb*, and that *Slumber of Endymion*, so replete with grace and religious sentiment, that one after the other receive the adoration of my friend.

To these succeed the tragic *Justice Pursuing Crime* by Proudhon, the *Sabines* by David, the *Battle of Eylau* by Gros, and the humbler but interesting efforts of Gérard, Drouais, Sigalon, and Mme. Vigée-Lebrun.

We have been there more than an hour, and I have made the circuit of the room eight or ten times. Baudouin would remain until the morrow, but I finally succeed in dragging him away. Walking at my side he murmurs disjointed words:

“How content I am! How content I am! It exceeds my expectations a thousand fold!”

Our eyes are dazzled with a gorgeous display of gold, crystal, marble, onyx, Sèvres ware, gems, enamels, silver carvings. It is the Gallery of Apollo.

We will pass on without pausing before those cabinets. We will pass on without bestowing a glance on that adorable window which has witnessed so many bloody and appalling tragedies. Let us pass on and not so much as raise our eyes to Delacroix's marvellous ceiling, that saturnalia of light and colour so worthy of the day god whom it represents; should Baudouin perceive it he could not be prevailed on to leave the spot. To the pictures. It is to the Salon Carré that I desire to introduce him.

The Wedding of Cana! Where shall I find words to describe Baudouin's raptures at sight of that admirable fête! It fortunately happened that the round sofa in the middle of the room was unoccupied. He dropped upon it rather than sat down, like one stricken with vertigo. Then all at once I saw a smile appear upon his face. All his features were relaxed and illumined by a tender light.

"What delicious music!" he softly murmured.

I, a profane outsider, supposed that he referred to the concert which is being given in the foreground of the picture by the person in the white dalmatic playing on the viol, and who is no other than Veronese in person, assisted by Titien performing on the bass-viol and Tintorette on the flute.

"Can you hear it?" I asked, half in earnest, half in jest.

He did not condescend to turn to answer me.

"And you, can you not hear it?" he said, with suppressed feeling. "Can you not see all the persons live, talk, and move in that enchanted atmosphere? Do you not hear the clatter of the golden dishes, the soft steps of the domestics, the hum of conversation, and, rising over all like a continuous bass, the voluptuous strains of the viol? Ah! where does a man find inspiration to achieve

a work like that ! It makes one despair of ever accomplishing anything beautiful and grand ! ”

He ceased and remained sunk in deep reflection.

I respected his abstraction for a time. Then, seeing that he made no effort to rouse himself, I determined to try the effect of a diversion. I forced him to rise and make the tour of the salon with me, pausing in succession before the canvasses of Raphael and Correggio, Andrea del Sarto's *Holy Family*, Murillo's *Assumption*, and the magnificent *Charles I.* by Van Dyck.

To all these *chefs d'œuvre* Baudouin gave a look and made a reverence. But soon he came back to the *Wedding of Cana*.

The *Duke of Ferrara* by Titien and the canvasses of Philippe de Champaigne detained him longer. Gérard Dow's *Dropsical Woman* occupied his attention for five minutes, and I thought I was really going to win the day when I saw him stop in protracted contemplation before, first, Leonardo da Vinci's *Monna Lisa*, and afterward the wonderful *Concert* by Giorgione.

But again he returned, as if drawn by an invincible magnet, to the *Wedding of Cana*. I should be afraid to say how many times I was an amused spectator of these oscillations, but the performance was repeated at least ten or twelve times.

“It has become a disease with you,” I said to him at last, laughingly ; “you must have change of air.”

He did not object overmuch when I led him away to the Hall of the Seven Masters. But his heart was in the Salon Carré, and it was doubtful if he had any very definite perception of the canvasses that were presented to his view. It was not until he reached the great gallery and found himself in presence of Velasquez's *Infanta* and

Watteau's *Embarkation* that he found his tongue again. Then, when we came to where the Rubens collection was displayed, he sank into another dumb ecstasy of admiration.

The condition into which these æsthetic emotions plunged him was unlike anything I had ever seen before or was destined to see after. As is the case with every one, it has frequently happened me at the Louvre and at Rome, Florence, Naples, Munich, Madrid, to be struck by the beauties of a work of art and devote a long time to its inspection ; as with every one, it has been my privilege to encounter, either in the museums or at expositions, more or less earnest amateurs in raptures before a painting ; I have witnessed many curious and striking scenes, many comedies that were simply grotesque. I have seen great critics take notes, wielding their pencil as if it had been a sceptre, and Englishwomen with corkscrew ringlets give themselves a crick in the neck by dint of gazing up at a ceiling painted by a tyro. Never, however, have I seen anything at all comparable to the sort of mild lunacy that overcame my friend Baudouin at sight of all those masterpieces.

It was not his moral nature alone that was affected, but his physical as well. There were times when I could see him tremble with emotion, and, if he chanced to touch me with his hand, it almost burned me. He laughed, he cried, he darted forward, he hung back, standing like one in a trance.

There can be no doubt that in his case there existed an extraordinary sensibility to artistic impressions, and one of the chief functions of a museum is to discover such exceptional predispositions.

I took advantage of his abstraction to turn him in the direction of the French School. The profound tranquil-

lity of the Lesueurs appeared to exert a soothing influence on his fever, and the immense works of Lebrun completed the work of restoring him to his senses. He was soon in a condition to talk reasonably on what we had seen.

“Where could my wits have been when I hesitated as to choice of a profession? I will be a painter, *parbleu!* So that is settled.”

“Good! You say that because we have seen only the pictures thus far. Wait until we come to the antiques.”

“True! there is the statuary; I had not thought of that. Come on; let’s go there now.”

I think Baudouin would not have been sorry to return by way of the Salon Carré; but I felt I could not trust him, and, on leaving the Hall of the Seven Chimneys, directed his steps toward the collections of Grecian vases and Egyptian antiquities.

Steering a rapid course past these seductive reefs and shoals, we came to the northern staircase of the colonnade, descending which we found ourselves in the basement among the rooms devoted to Africa and Magnesia, the halls of Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture, and the collections of Greek antiquities from Asia Minor.

His enthusiasm increased with every step he took. Before we had come to the *Gladiator* he had made a burnt offering, one by one, on the altar of statuary of almost all the gods of painting.

When, finally, we stood before this *chef-d’œuvre*, the *auto-da-fé* was consummated. As had happened on the floor above, in the Salon Carré, Baudouin would see nothing else. It almost required an exertion of force to lead him to the *Psyche*, the *Adonis*, the *Medea*, and through the corridor of Pan to the Roman rooms and the collection of the Cæsars.

But here, again, he appeared cold and inattentive, and turned back, instinctively, to the beautiful Greek athlete, who will remain for all time the marvel of anatomical marvels.

I had my little surprise in readiness, and allowed myself to be conducted toward the colossal Melpomene.

Turning suddenly to the left, I raised a curtain of red velvet, and, at the bottom of the sanctuary that had been set apart for her, the *Venus of Milo* appeared to us in her divine loveliness.

I shall never forget the overwhelming effect that the sudden vision produced on Baudouin. When I saw how matters were with him, I almost regretted that I had subjected him to such a shock. It was more than admiration that was depicted on his countenance; it was something bordering on terror.

With fixed and staring eyes, his mouth wide open, emotion clutching at his throat, his hands extended before him, he remained for some moments as motionless as the statues in the gallery. Finally, he gave utterance to an exclamation that was picturesque by reason of its very triviality :

“Ah! this beats all!”

I saw that this time he was under the influence of an inspired delirium, which it behooved me to respect.

“Sit down there,” I said, pushing him down on one of the divans, “and admire her at your leisure.”

Then, without another word, I stole away and left him to his contemplation. I had heard my mother say that one who desires to extract the utmost of pleasure from such occasions needs to be alone. Catalogue in hand, I strolled away to the end of the gallery, of which I made the tour with leisurely steps.



“THE VENUS OF MILO APPEARED BEFORE THEM.”



When I returned to the shrine of the goddess, Baudouin, as I had anticipated, had not moved. He had remained in the place where I had seated him, lost, drowned, dead to everything but his rapture.

"Come! this is enough for the present," I said, taking him affectionately by the arm. "Do you know that you have been sitting here nearly an hour?"

"Don't make sport of me," he said, passing his hand across his eyes. "I am so happy! Ah, is n't it glorious, Albert, is n't it glorious! That is all I can find to say. I have seen photographs and plaster copies without number of this divine original; but how poor they all are beside the statue!"

"Good! those are the identical observations you were making a while ago in regard to Paul Veronese's great picture!"

"The Veronese!" cried Baudouin; "indisputably it possesses motion, warmth, life. It is a magnificent work, adorable, all that a painting can be, in fine; but this, my dear fellow, it is beauty incarnate, eternal, super-human!"

"Well, you will have opportunities of seeing it again. But you want to save a little of your enthusiasm for the moderns, which we have not inspected yet."

"No; it is ended. I can look at nothing more to-day. Let us go away, please; I am all unstrung. I feel as if I needed air."

We directed our steps toward the Champs-Élysées, intending there to take the Versailles road homeward. It was nearly four o'clock, and night was descending rapidly from the December sky. The cold, keen air stung our faces and sent the blood coursing through our veins as we pursued our way.

Baudouin was in an indescribable state of exaltation. The young fellow, usually so calm and self-contained, was no longer master of himself. He took long strides, his eyes flashed, his cheeks were scarlet, he talked incessantly.

“It is decided! I will be a sculptor! Nothing shall prevent me. It is not worth while to contend against what one feels to be his vocation, don’t you see? There is nothing else in all the world that I feel an interest in. I told you so six years ago, don’t you remember, when we first discussed the matter in our walks.”

“Yes, but you also told me that you meant to select a calling that should not inflict further expense on your mother, and I have an idea that there are few, if any, careers that are more costly than the sculptor’s,—think of the length of time one has to wait before any results are obtained.”

“I don’t care! Don’t talk to me of such details. I will eat clay if necessary, like the savages of Terra del Fuego, or I won’t eat at all,—or I will ply a trade, no matter what, in the morning, that I may model and design at night; but the matter is decided, I tell you; I mean to be a sculptor!”

Our conversation on this subject was long drawn out. We were as hot as ever when we reached home, and at dinner were unable to converse on any other theme. My father listened, with a thoughtful air.

“So, you would be a sculptor!” he finally said to Baudouin. “It is a noble ambition. But for your own and your mother’s welfare, think twice before embarking on so perilous a venture. Do you know what one of those works of bronze or marble that you admire so represents? It represents, at the very least, fifteen or twenty years of persevering study, privations, failures; the defeat of

thirty rivals, the death of ten others — in one word, hell on earth for one-half your life, and, possibly, a crust of bread for the other half. Ah, my lad, if you had come in contact with one of those terrible existences, as it has been my lot to do on one or two occasions, you would know something of the trials and sufferings that precede, and often accompany to the end, the realization of a wish like yours !”

Baudouin entertained for my father the deepest respect, united to the warmest affection. He was dismayed by this distressing picture, and his head fell forward on his chest.

From this time forth, he talked no more of being a sculptor, but it is my opinion that he continued to think of it none the less.



CHAPTER XII.

WINTER SPORTS.—THINGS TALKED OF IN THE PLAYGROUND.—A BEGINNING OF REHABILITATION.—OF THE DANGER OF FENCING WITHOUT A MASK.

BAUDOUIN'S presence at the lycée quickly produced the beneficial effect on me that my father had expected. The influence of that warm and generous friendship restored me to my better self again. The evening at the Français had already shown me how inane and ridiculous were my literary pretensions. Baudouin's raillery cured me of my aspirations to be a swell.

He was without pity for Lecachey. His jealousy assisting, — for he had seen at the first glance who the substitute was whom I had nominated to fill his place in his absence, — he never missed an opportunity of calling my attention to the foibles and imperfections of my elegant friend.

But what completed my cure was the inclination for manly exercises, which I had lost to some extent since my arrival at Paris, and which revived under Baudouin's precept and example.) The fencing lesson, (in which he and Verschuren replaced the little dandy whose feeble wrists were quick to tire) was the chief delight of our day. Not that our teacher, M. Goudouneix, favoured us with much variety. The worthy man would repeat the same thing over and over for an hour on end :

“Come, monsieur, on guard! You take the foil in the right hand, the thumb lying flat along the handle, the nails of the other fingers facing to the left. Don’t grasp the weapon with all your strength, hold it lightly between the thumb and index finger, the forearm flexed, the elbow against the side, the shoulder motionless, the wrist breast high — ”

[And so he went on, in one monotonous, unvarying tone, resuming his directions when I resumed the movement. I cannot remember that he ever introduced any variations into his tune, or that he ever added a word to his formula as he had received it from the provost in the early days of his regimental education. It was evidently connected indissolubly in his mind with the theory and practice of fencing, and he considered it impossible to give or receive a thrust without the mental accompaniment of that string of words.

And then there were the time-worn forms of speech, that he regarded at the same time as the essence of fencing, and the supreme expression of French courtesy. With what gravity he would teach us to say :

“After you, *mossieu!* Excuse me, you first. Not I, *mossieu!* From obedience, then !”

Then the sword lowered, the sword erect, the salute to right, the salute to left, the three little taps for attention, pan, pan, pan! and on guard —]

]But all that was only a prelude to what was, in our eyes, the all important business — the assault.

How proud we were, when, our faces masked, and breasts protected by the plastron, we were at last permitted to take part in the mimic combat !

“A hit !”

“No, only on the thigh.”

“Messieurs, you are losing your guard! Come to parade, if you please; come to parade. You see your adversary uncovered, and neglect to take advantage of it.”

How good we seemed to feel when we came back to quarters, with very red faces, and our hearts thumping with the excitement of the sham duel!

After awhile, our fencing and exercises in the gymnasium ceased to satisfy our needs. It was agreed that a portion of our Sundays should be employed in cultivating our muscular development. As soon as we had swallowed our breakfast, off we posted to one of the great museums. Then, after a space of two hours precisely, neither more nor less, devoted to the enjoyment — it was Baudouin himself who had the heroism to fix the limit — we hurried away to the garden of the Luxembourg to play at football.

We had no difficulty in securing admission to one of the small open-air clubs that practise this charming sport. The members were for the most part young mechanics of the neighbourhood, in nowise of an exclusive disposition. Two or three eulogistic remarks on a well-managed rush, and a few words indicating our interest in the game, sufficed to break the ice; this first advance made, we were invited to throw off our coats and come down into the arena. That resulted in our preferring a request to be allowed to contribute our quota to the weekly expenses. In a word, before three weeks had rolled by we were members in good standing of the “Swallows,” one of those clubs that meet under the magnificent trees of the Luxembourg to enjoy that noble exercise, and I venture to say that we were not the inexpertest members, either. Baudouin, in particular, soon acquired a merited reputation for the energy

and accuracy of his play, as well as for his unfailing good nature.

On the stroke of four we would take the Grenelle omnibus and go home to eat our dinner, — with what appetite it is easy to imagine.

We also introduced the game in the playground of the lycée, and although certain of our classmates scouted it at first, as unworthy of big boys like us, it ultimately triumphed over those one-sided notions. Every one soon came to see that there was nothing like kicking the ball as a remedy for cold toes in that frosty weather.

One of our earliest recruits was Payan, and it was not long before he was one of the game's most enthusiastic champions.

“For putting a man in trim for three or four hours of differential calculus, it is ahead of everything!” he said.

All our recreation time was not spent in active sports, however. Often we preferred to pace the leaf-strewn alleys and discuss the everlasting question, always full of interest to us, the choice of a career.

“What are you going to be?” was certainly the query that was oftenest on our lips.

And nothing more natural when it is considered that, collegians to-day, a few short months will see us launched on life's stormy sea. There will be other things to think of then than first or second place, a prize in Latin verse or Greek composition. The great battle is about to open, into which it behooves him who enters to go fully armed. *What are you going to be?* The wonder is, not that the question was asked in our familiar talks, but that it was not asked more frequently. Is it not the end and ultimate, supreme conclusion of all our school training?

The answers, it is hardly necessary to say, were of an extremely miscellaneous nature. Humanity did not wait for Horace to enunciate, in immortal verse, his famous

"Sunt quos curriculo . . ."

to provide us with as infinite a variety of vocations as it displays of feature and disposition. But what remains most deeply impressed upon my memory in those discussions, where so many dreams were given momentary substance, so many airy castles erected and demolished, is the perfect gravity, the sincere patriotism displayed by all of us.

True, each of us had his own personal preoccupation, but it must be understood that the glory, might, and grandeur of France occupied a place above and beyond all else. There was not one of us who, in aiming at success, did not desire it for the sake of his family in the first place, and next for the sake of that larger family which is the fatherland.

Our fault lay, not so much in lack of ardour in our aspirations for the future, as in our inability to properly adjust those aspirations to our strength. It is certain that several of our number were seduced by the external attributes of their chosen career.

Molécule, for instance, would have done far better to try for a position in the administration of the finances — for which he was particularly well qualified by reason of his distinct handwriting, his correctness at figures, and his great powers of application — rather than to offend Minerva by keeping on rhyming and producing epic poems that had in them no more poetry than a trial balance.

Chavasse had indisputably more aptitude for degustation than for the *École des Chartes*, which he proposed enter-

ing on leaving the lycée, and he would have had an infinitely better chance of making a name for himself in deciding on the relative merits of the great *crus* of the Bordelais and of Burgundy than in deciphering palimpsests.

I shall say nothing of those who would fain be doctors and yet gave almost no attention to their physiology and chemistry, lawyers, and totally neglected those incomparable models, Demosthenes and Cicero.

These ill-chosen and loosely fitting vocations were in sharp contrast with those that had been selected after mature deliberation, as in the case of Payan and Baudouin, for example. Of all my old schoolfellows it was they who were certainly the most successful; most successful, I mean, in filling the special rôle they had chosen for themselves in society, and, looking back upon the past, I can attribute that success to no other cause than the generous ardour with which from the very beginning they applied themselves to their task.

Payan, who was preparing for the *École Polytechnique*, was not one of those who are content to be admitted and then trust to the chances of the examinations to determine the career which they are ultimately to pursue. He had said to himself, *I mean to be an engineer*, — the engineers are those who stand highest in the class, — and had gone to work accordingly.

I well remember the day, when, striding up and down the alleys of the courtyard, he opened his mind and told us of his dreams; and now that his noble ambition is realized, I cannot refrain from admiring the clear judgment and foresight that he then exhibited.

“This,” he said, “is the age of industry; it is its honour and its mission. When all the mountains shall have been tunneled, all the isthmuses pierced, all the marshes drained

and made productive, all the deserts explored and peopled, all the nations united by one great railway system, we shall certainly be nearer to the golden age. But that is not what attracts me in the engineer's profession. What I find in it to admire is the conflict constantly waged between the spirit of mathematics and inert matter, the subjugation of the material forces, which makes its power the triumph of human genius. What might and majesty of intellect are represented in the smallest mechanical progress! And the impulse that has been given to that progress in the last two or three hundred years! The engineer penetrates the entrails of the earth to wrest its treasures from it, he bridges seas, makes obedient servants of the winds, and tames the lightning. His drills have pierced the Saint Gothard, and to-morrow will pierce the Himalaya; his ocean cables bring New York and Calcutta within reach of the humblest Parisian; his great steamships realize the enchanted carpet of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Give him a pig of iron, — he will convert it into rails on which you will ride without a jolt from Paris to St. Petersburg, cannon to defend your fireside, a printing-press to disseminate among the people the wonders of art and the masterpieces of literature. What are men to him, from the lowliest to the mightiest? Agents, mere tools, who could accomplish nothing without him, who are strong only in his strength, and who, if he should disappear, would immediately be reduced to the level of the savages of Oceanica!"

"Do you know," here exclaimed Dutheil, "that you are really eloquent! You quite take the conceit out of me, whose humbler destination is the bar. Listening to you, I should almost be tempted to throw the toga to the dogs! And yet, the science of the law is not without a grandeur

of its own. Everything in this world is not reduced to the mere question of material interest and the triumph of brute strength. There is a philosophy of life to be fathomed and formulated, necessary relations, as Montesquieu says, to be deduced from the nature of things, the idea of right and justice to be coined and put in circulation. Confess that the rôle of the legist has a notability of its own, to which you should not let yourself be blinded by your brilliant visions."

"And the instructor of youth!" said I; "do you not think that his calling, too, is a glorious one? You, Payan, would subdue nature; but is it not true that she frequently remains intractable in face of the most heroic efforts, and in the fierce conflict is not the engineer as often vanquished as victorious? You, Dutheil, speak of absolute justice. But, when the legist descends from the serene heights of speculation to put his theories in practice, do you believe that he is always the faithful servant of that austere mistress? Has he not constantly to encounter impracticabilities and conflicting laws? Ah, how much finer and nobler appears to me the rôle of the teacher in his more modest sphere! His malleable material is not gold or iron; it is man himself. He models after his own image the generations to come, that is to say, the future of the nation. According to the nature and the value of his teachings, the country will to-morrow be powerful or impotent, free or enslaved, happy or wretched. He prepares history, he moulds the minds of men, he breathes into the entire body of the people the breath of moral life. That engineer, the soldier, the legist, of whom you speak,—it is he who creates them; but for him they would never put off their mental swaddling clothes."

“And the artist!” Baudouin broke in; “what have you to say of him? I suppose he does not deserve a word of mention, he who makes everything from nothing, who is a creator in the widest acceptation of the term! How little he cares for your opinion, though! Practical affairs trouble him not, and the interests of the day and the morrow are the least of his cares. His domain is the infinite, his dream the absolute. With a stroke of his powerful pinion he rises above humanity, its petty strifes, and miseries, to lose himself in the contemplation of eternal beauty and give expression to it in his works.”

On such matters did we discourse without end, never tiring of splintering lances in behalf each of his favourite career. It is hardly necessary to say, however, that our conversation did not always assume this philosophic character. Our discussions were oftener on more material topics,—examinations, age limits, and such matters. There was no one about the lycée better posted than we were as to the regulation details. We knew how many admissions each lycée had had last year to each school; to what choice his place on the graduation list entitled one; the number of vacant places there would probably be at the ensuing promotion; how many merits were required for a given doctorate, and so forth. There were endless dissertations on the relative importance of such and such branches of study, and anecdotes innumerable of some “old boy” whom the present members of Montaigne had known in their day, and who was now at the Polytechnique, the Centrale, or Saint-Cyr.

And then, besides, there were devices, alleged to be infallible, and not always quite reputable, for “passing” successfully, traditions of bygone examinations, and particulars, of more or less authenticity, concerning the exam-

iners. This one was gentle as a lamb, that one was just the opposite. There was a certain M. Lefebvre, a veritable ogre ; he finished you off and picked your bones at a single mouthful. As well own up deficient at once, when one had to do with him. M. Lefebvre ! I never saw him, I never had the honour of being "dished" by him, but I can say that he often visited my boyish dreams, as the image of all that was mightiest and most terrible.

A question that never failed to arouse our passions to a violent pitch was the relative position of literature and science to each other. It was our dispute of the ancients and the moderns. Dutheil and Payan, particularly, had terrific encounters on this ground.

To take the word of one of the most eminent of our Taupins for it, the sciences alone were fit objects for the occupation of a superior mind. Literature was, at best, a harmless diversion, a rather childish recreation, within reach of ordinary intellects. He would as lief as not have spoken disrespectfully of Homer or Virgil. In any case the fame of a Copernicus or a Lavoisier appeared to him infinitely more glorious. But he had an adversary who gave him as good as he sent.

In the eyes of Dutheil, on the other hand, the sciences in general occupied a position of only secondary importance. The great monuments of human genius, histories, epics, the drama, and the like, alone afforded profitable and interesting objects of study. Very unjustly, as I thought, he went to an excess directly the opposite of his opponent's, and pooh-poohed the value of scientific discovery.

"What do I care for an invention more or less!" he cried. "What is hidden to-day will be found to-morrow. The sciences are a chain of logical deductions which are



bound to flow from man's civilization and his familiarity, when sufficiently prolonged, with his natural surroundings. Suppose all the sciences annihilated in some great cataclysm, — in a few years, or, at all events, in a few centuries, they will be reconstructed. Humanity will do as Blaise Pascal did : it will suffice it to know the first two or three theorems to deduce the rest. That has happened several times ; it is perfectly certain, for instance, that the Egyptians and Assyrians had as accurate a knowledge of geometry as you have. That which, once it is lost, there is no regaining, is the writings of a Homer, a Virgil, a Horace ; they are the perfect expression, condensed into the space of a few pages, of the soul and genius of a chosen race. That expression you have no other way of knowing than to possess the text, and if you suppose the text to have perished, as in a conflagration like that of the library of Alexandria, for instance, no human effort can restore it."

"Well, what of it?" replied Payan. "Do you suppose that if the world should be deprived of the *Iliad* it would be the worse for it? The smallest improvement in the valves of the air-pump is of far greater importance."

"There is just where you are mistaken!" Dutheil hotly rejoined. "The man who invents that or any other improvement is certainly a useful member of society ; he contributes to our well-being, and thus far is entitled to our gratitude. But after all, what is he but a wheel in the machine, a mechanic of superior attainments, an animated tool? You cannot claim that he is a man of that broad culture and universal wisdom which are only to be acquired by patient study of the great writers. It is not without reason that the pursuits of literature are given the singularly apt name of *the humanities*. They alone, being the mirror of eternal man, can serve to fashion complete men,

by impregnating them with the loftiest thoughts formulated by the great minds of all ages. Newton, Copernicus, Lavoisier, and the rest, vast as is the domain of their research, are blind to all save that which is directly beneath their eyes. It is reserved for a Homer, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Molière, to soar, not above the collective wisdom of their time alone, but above the mass of man's attainments of all time, to perfect its synthesis and hand it down to us, often in a single word. And that is why I prefer, for my part, until I see reason to change my mind, to live in communion with them rather than in the intimacy of your specialists. Show me a specialist, and I will show you an illiberal, narrow-minded man."

"You do well to speak of limitations! Compare the domain of Newton, which is space, with the domain of Molière, which is the household of a Harpagon or the feeble intellect of a M. Purgon —"

"Just so, my dear fellow, but consider Molière's prescience in painting so lifelike a portrait of you two hundred years ago, in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. You have but to open the book, if you can spare the time from your beloved equations, to see in it your specialists, each vaunting his own particular hobby and proclaiming its merits from the housetops —"

Nothing less than the beat of the drum sufficed to restore peace and bring these breezy discussions to an end.

To the despair of Molécule, whose rhymes seemed to flow more copiously than ever after his disaster, I had taken up my studies again with a determination to profit by them subsequently to the renunciation of my poetic ambitions, and my time at the lycée was spent to better advantage than during the earlier months. My standing

felt the influence of this changed condition of affairs. But I had not yet succeeded in overcoming my foolish pride sufficiently to hand in another theme to the terrible M. Auger.

This affected me with remorseful feelings at times, and prevented me from being as happy as I should by right have been with parents as affectionate as mine, a friend as dear as Baudouin, and masters as distinguished as those of the Lycée Montaigne.

But nobody is perfect, and I least of all. My confounded vanity was always on the alert, ready to take offence, and I believe that my only consolation, when thinking of the reception that had been accorded to my first literary effort, was that Baudouin, witness of my glory at Châtillon, had not been witness of my shame at Paris.

An unlooked-for incident occurred presently and brought this absurd situation to an end.

We had been given a composition in Greek, and although I had done my best and felt that I had made myself master of the subject, I was not counting on compliments. It was an agreeable surprise, therefore, when M. Auger, on reaching my exercise, which was this time numbered three, suddenly said :

“ M. Besnard’s work is deserving of commendation. It is clear and free from redundancy, it shows a distinct understanding of the meaning of words, and if the style were only a little less diffuse I should not have hesitated to mark it higher. I wonder why M. Besnard, who has shown what he can do when he cares to try, hardly ever hands in his exercises to be read. His work to-day testifies that he could and should aspire to a higher standing.”

I blushed up to the whites of my eyes, and made no reply. But five minutes later M. Auger returned to the

charge. This time it was in relation to a disputed passage in Livy, taken from the "Conciones."

"Come, Monsieur Besnard, take the book," said the master. "I am curious to see what you are capable of in the way of an improvised translation."

You may imagine that I used my best efforts to acquit myself of my task satisfactorily. I was so fortunate as to succeed, grasp the meaning of the passage, and hit on exactly the right words to express it.

"That is really not at all bad!" remarked M. Auger when I came to the end of my paragraph. "You have evidently had careful instruction, monsieur, and I can only express my astonishment at the strange mystery with which you seem to surround yourself here. You should not give way to indolence as you have been doing. Set to work again, let me have some *Lege Quæsos* from you — I make a formal demand for them."

There was nothing to be said; it was a distinct rehabilitation. After an invitation expressed in such obliging terms I clearly had not the shadow of an excuse for longer shirking what was plainly my duty.

And yet I know not if my miserable false shame would not have deterred me from facing again the terrors of public criticism had not Baudouin thrown himself into the breach.

"M. Auger is perfectly right," he said to me when we were let out for recess. "Why don't you give him exercises to read?"

I tried to argue the matter with him, to give him to understand that I was holding myself in reserve for weightier tasks. But as I did not give him my real motive, — which, moreover, was not of a particularly convincing nature, — Baudouin had no difficulty in demolishing my arguments.

The result of this discussion and of an internal conflict which lasted all one day and a portion of the night was that I finally arrived at the heroic resolution of again tempting fortune with a *Lege Quæso*.

But an accident that happened to me about this time interrupted the éven tenor of my existence and did not allow M. Auger to profit by the first-fruits of my repentance.

~~444~~ We were at the fencing school, and, contrary to his usual habit, M. Goudouneix, who was punctuality itself, had not yet made his appearance. Very foolishly Verschuren and I had taken advantage of his absence to have a bout with the foils, unmasked. It seemed to us more manly that way.

I was brisk and full of life. Verschuren had given ground at first, which had only the effect of exciting me the more. He was making play warily, holding his blade in a line with his body, and parrying with caution, careful not to leave himself uncovered.

All at once he attacked with such fury, just as I was in the act of delivering a thrust, that his foil broke short off, and the fragment remaining in his hand grazed my neck under the right ear. Baudouin gave a loud cry and hastened toward us.

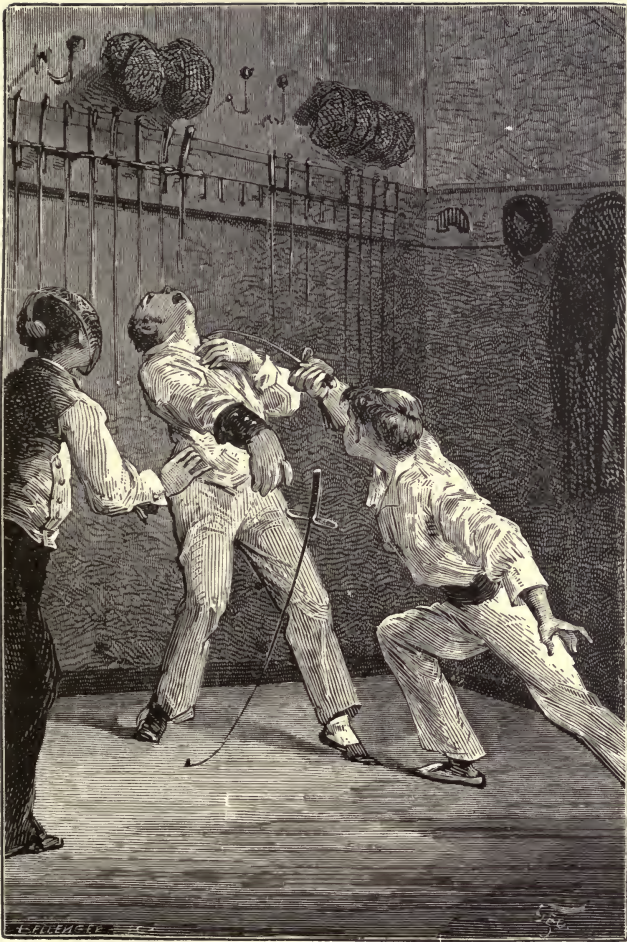
“Stop!”

“What is the matter?” said I.

At the same moment I saw that I was covered with blood and felt a sensation of warmth on my shoulder.

“You are hurt!” said Baudouin, receiving me in his arms.

A small crowd gathered round me. Verschuren, horrified by what he had done, gave his handkerchief to arrest the flow of blood. I tried to reassure him, but the room



“VERSCHUREN ATTACKED WITH SUCH VIGOUR.”

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seemed to be turning round and round, then all grew dark before me and I lost consciousness.

When I came to my senses, I perceived that I was being carried, supported by the legs and shoulders. I experienced a sensation of weakness that was not disagreeable, and made no attempt to open my eyes. I heard the sound of voices in discussion. With whom? It was a matter of perfect indifference to me. Then stifled exclamations, an ascent of a staircase, during which it seemed to me that my head was down and my heels were in the air, a transit that appeared as if it would never end, a confused murmur of voices. Then I was laid upon a bed that seemed deliciously soft and comfortable, and fell asleep.

Something moist and warm, trickling over my left hand, awoke me. I raised my heavy eyelids.

I was in a little white-curtained bed, in the infirmary of the lycée.

"See, the poor dear is opening his eyes!" said a familiar voice at my bedside. It was Aunt Aubert; she was holding my hand, and it was her tears that had moistened it.

I gave a quick look round the room. Mamma, my father, Baudouin, grandpa, Verschuren were there, and in the background the principal, the proctor, and two or three other persons. "I must have been asleep an awfully long time for all these people to have time to get here," I thought. A stout, clean-shaven gentleman, with gray side-whiskers closely trimmed, leaves the group, and comes toward my bed.

"Well, my lad," he says, feeling my pulse, "we are n't going to step down and out for a little thing like this, are

we? That would be too great a sorrow for mamma. Come, mesdames, cheer up; you have no cause for alarm," he resumed presently; "a few days will set him right again. The pulse is favourable, just enough fever to show that we have not parted with our strength. The wound is nicely bandaged; there is nothing to fear from internal hemorrhage. If this long-legged youngster can only content himself to lie still in bed, all will be well—"

"Could he not be brought home?" my mother asked, in a voice of entreaty.

"We will see about that in four or five days from now," the doctor replied. "For the moment, all he requires is quiet, — rest and quiet. And I don't know but it would be as well if he would go to sleep again—"

Two kisses closed my eyes. I hear a sound of footsteps softly pattering over the carpet, as if a lot of mice were scampering toward the door. All the people are departing, evidently, all save two loved forms, seated on either side the bed, of whose presence I am dimly conscious through my half-closed eyes.

Mamma and Aunt Aubert had obtained permission to remain with me. They watched me by night, and attended to my wants by day, with a devotion that never wearied. All day long it was nothing but caresses, cups of bouillon, glasses of Malaga, gentle words, and tears of happiness on seeing me out of danger. No one knows, until he has passed through such an experience, what depths of tenderness lie hidden in the bosom of a mother and an Aunt Aubert.

My father came to see me twice a day, and Baudouin and Verschuren never failed to put in an appearance at the noonday recess. I do not remember ever having been happier in my life, than during that brief period spent in

the infirmary of the Lycée Montaigne. All those attentions demonstrated to me so clearly the affection of my family and my friends!

The wound, by great good luck, was not really serious, and two weeks at Billancourt completed my convalescence. It is needless to say, however, what a host of arguments the accident supplied to mamma and Aunt Aubert, against the dangerous and pernicious practice of fencing. It required the exercise of my father's authority and my own solemn promise never to handle the foils again, without observing every precaution, before permission was accorded me to return to the fencing school.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW PROFESSOR.

LESS than a week had elapsed since my return to the lycée, when the class in rhetoric was painfully surprised one morning by the important tidings with which M. Auger prefaced his lecture.

“Gentlemen, we meet to-day as professor and pupils for the last time. A decree of the Ministry has summoned me to the functions of Inspector-General of Secondary Instruction. My successor is appointed. He will enter upon his duties to-morrow —”

A murmur rose from the benches. M. Auger continued :

“You will admit, gentlemen, that such a preferment is not one that a father and husband, as I am, can regard without satisfaction. It is the crowning of my career, the marshal’s baton of our little educational army, and if I pretended that I was not pleased to receive it, I should be guilty of hypocrisy. Again, you can understand that after having explained the beauties of Sophocles and Tacitus in one spot, daily, for ten or twelve years, I shall not be altogether sorry to have a change of scene and labours. And yet, in spite of all, these sentiments are dashed with a regretful feeling. In taking leave of a class that I have conducted almost half-way on its road, I am conscious of that pang which all feel at the sundering

of old habits and relations, at the abandonment of labours undertaken and hopes shared in common. I should be glad, could I remain with you to the end of the school year, sharing to the end your efforts and your fortunes at the examinations. My superiors have decided otherwise; there is nothing for me but to obey. But it will be a pleasant thought for me if I can believe that among you are some who will cherish kindly memories of their old master —”

He was interrupted by the universal acclamation of the class.

“All! all!” they shouted, with an enthusiasm which I participated in equally with the rest; there was no trace left of the hateful rancour which had too long been festering in my bosom.

The cry came from our hearts, with perfect spontaneity. We were not misled by the superficial irony of the professor’s little speech, and, reading between the lines, we appreciated its genuine emotion. For the first time we were fully aware of the conquest he had made of our esteem and almost of our affection, notwithstanding his outspokenness and the occasional roughness of his manner.

But he resumed immediately :

“Come! that is well, — I thank you, gentlemen. And now, as we have only two hours left, let us try to employ them to advantage.”

He opened his book and began the exercises of the day.

But the ferment into which the great news had thrown us was not to be so readily allayed. A sort of groundswell ran through the class, as happens at sea after a long continued gale. We answered the master’s direct questions

and made a pretence of listening to his explanations, but all our thoughts were on his coming departure.

From the four corners of the room, and almost simultaneously, notes were started on their journey to Dutheil, urging him to present the adieux of the class to our professor on the occasion of our parting.

In his capacity as dean of the veterans and tenant in perpetuity of the bench of honour, he could not well refuse to comply with our request, and he nodded his head in token of acceptance. We saw him during the remainder of the hour taking notes and jotting down brief sentences, — furbishing up his arms, so to speak, — occasionally running his big, strong hand through his rumpled hair the while.

At last the hour struck. The roll of the drum reëchoed through the corridors. Dutheil, signing to us to remain in our places, immediately rose and addressed M. Auger.

His little speech was brief, a little hyperbolic, perhaps, but it expressed felicitously the sentiments of the entire class. At two or three points it was endorsed by our unanimous applause.

M. Auger was evidently deeply moved. He came down from his rostrum and “embraced us all in the person of Dutheil,” as he affectionately said, adding, almost immediately, with his bantering air :

“It is my adieu of Fontainebleau.”

All was over. We sorrowfully left the class-room. M. Auger was no longer our professor.

An event of such magnitude naturally furnished food for conversation during the remainder of the day. There was a lesson in history for the afternoon, and the coming of the new professor was set down for the following morning.

What would he be like, that interloper? Not *his* equal in brains and learning, that was a sure thing. He was not the man to explain Tacitus as our old master had *done*, we knew that beforehand. And Greek? Oh, *yes!* he would possess as much Greek as *he did* — maybe! And philology; a fine *figure* he would cut lecturing on philology from M. Auger's chair. Ah, we hated him before we had seen him! We were all ready to analyze him, dissect him, not receive his theories unless he gave us chapter and verse for them.

It was not seventy-five lyceans, it was seventy-five inflexible and merciless judges who marched in next morning and seated themselves on the benches of the rhetoric class.

The new professor, his cap drawn down over his eyes and his nose buried in his papers, appeared to be deeply occupied. Aha! timid, too, is he? All that could be seen of his face was a huge pair of jet-black side-whiskers that floated down upon his shoulders, and they, of course, did not give us much information about the man.

Perceiving, suddenly, that the benches were all filled, he raised his head and took off his cap.

Wonder of wonders! it was M. Pellerin.

The effect was theatrical, so entirely unexpected was it. My delight was such that it took away my breath. I could hardly believe the evidence of my eyes.

And yet there was no room for doubt. M. Pellerin had changed somewhat in the four years since I saw him last. He was maturer, stronger, stouter, more developed in every way than my recollection depicted him to me. But it was he, with his kindly honest face, so frank and at the same time so intelligent, his bright eyes, his neatly brushed hair, the repose and distinction of his bearing.

I instinctively turned and looked at Baudouin, whose bench was in the second row from mine. I could see that he was no less surprised and delighted than myself.

But hush! the master is about to speak.

His address is very brief, amounting to nothing scarcely,—only a few words to tell us that he appreciated the difficulty of the task that lies before him. He knows and prizes at its real value M. Auger's profound learning, the sureness and elegance of his methods, the charm of his teaching. Certainly, he cannot hope to equal such a model, or even to approach it. All he can say is that he will spare no efforts to be of service to us in accordance with the measure of his powers, and, if he cannot make us forget the incomparable master whom we have lost, at least endeavour to supply his place in the more essential particulars.

All which is said very simply and unaffectedly, in a low but firm voice, underneath which we think we detect the presence of a not too assertive authority.

Glancing around the class, I could see that it was pleased with this prologue to the play. In eulogizing M. Auger, M. Pellerin had gone straight to the mark, had touched us all in a tender spot. The charm of a pair of frank, penetrating eyes had done the rest. Youthful affections and respect are easily gained if one only knows how to go about it. It was clear that all our hearts were already enlisted in his favour.

Moreover, his would not have been a happy lot who should have attempted to resist. Baudouin and I were on our mettle, like a pair of fighting cocks. I verily believe that, had any one been so imprudent as to hazard an injurious reflection, we should have taken him by the throat and shaken him within an inch of his life. But there was

nothing of the sort. All hands were under the influence of the spell.

The recitation began. At that moment M. Pellerin, running his eyes over the class, recognized me. I gave him a little nod of the head, and the friendly manner in which he received it encouraged me to indicate Baudouin's presence by a glance from the corner of my eye. An expression of deep pleasure immediately overspread his face, and I thought I could see that it cost him an effort to preserve his dignity. He succeeded in doing so, however.

After the lessons came the correction of the theme of the day. This was an ode of Pindar, that M. Auger had given us to translate. None of us had succeeded in making a very creditable version, for it was terribly involved and difficult.

M. Pellerin began by giving us a literal translation of the ode, which he did with a facility and grace that at once enlightened the class as to the extent of his acquaintance with Greek. Then, in the most natural and unaffected manner, he proceeded to embroider his theme with all sorts of historical details of the freshest and most entrancing interest. It was plain that not only was he thoroughly acquainted with the language in its origin and all its principles, but that he loved it passionately and had made a special study of everything connected with it. Monuments and costumes of ancient Greece, its mythology, ethnology, philosophy, and art, nay, even the aspect of its landscapes, all fell from his lips with such profusion of detail and wealth of colouring that we might have imagined ourselves carried back to the time of the poet.

The class listened delightedly. I think it would have required little to elicit an outburst of applause from us.

I could see plainly that, from that time forth, M. Pellerin was master of his audience. After he had dictated to us another Greek version, he made a still further advance in our admiration by explaining to us a chapter of Tacitus as M. Auger himself could not have done; for our old master's erudition, as we presently began to see, had not quite kept abreast with the results of modern criticism.

The recitation came to an end. As we were rising to leave the room, M. Pellerin beckoned to Baudouin and me to come to him. We had only been waiting for the signal, and should have thrown ourselves into his arms if such a demonstration, at such a time and place, had not been entirely contrary to scholastic decorum.

"To what good fortune am I indebted for meeting you here again?" our professor asked.

We explained to him briefly the situation of affairs with us. He, in turn, informed us that he had returned from Greece about four months previously; the success of a pamphlet, which he had presented to the Academy of Inscriptions, on the recent excavations in the vicinity of Olympia, had resulted in his appointment to the Lycée Montaigne.

"It was a tremendous honour," he said, in conclusion, "and I was almost ashamed to accept it; but I shall do my best to deserve it by dint of attention and hard work. I was a little surprised not to see you on the bench of honour," he added, giving me a look; "that is a matter that must be changed now that I am consul; we will talk of it hereafter. Go, now, and rejoin your comrades."

He dismissed us with a cordial shake of the hand.

In the playground the excitement was extreme. The merits of the new professor were eagerly discussed; and Dutheil, who had been one of the loudest in his expres-

sions of regret for M. Auger's departure, was already the most enthusiastic in his admiration of M. Pellerin.

"You know him, do you?" he said to me when I came on the ground.

I gave him all the particulars that I had at command in relation to our dear friend and master. His astonishment increased when he learned that M. Pellerin had been head usher in a country academy and was not even a graduate of the Normal School.

"Well, well!" he cried; "his energy and intelligence must be something that we don't see the like of every day!"

I did not attempt to controvert his opinion.

Baudouin and I had laid our plans to pay M. Pellerin a visit at his abode on the following Sunday, and we were anticipating great enjoyment from our project. My father, to whom I had written without delay, announcing the great news, had a still more agreeable surprise in store for us.

"Whom do you think we are to have to dine with us this evening?" he asked, when he came to take us from the lycée.

We looked at him, interrogatively.

"M. Pellerin. I called on him yesterday, and he was so kind as to accept my invitation. He asked me to say to you that, if you have nothing better to do, he would be pleased if you would look in on him this afternoon at five o'clock, and bring him to the house with you."

It is scarcely necessary to say that we accepted with alacrity.

M. Pellerin lived in the Avenue des Ternes, where he had a small apartment of five rooms into which we were ushered by a pleasant-faced old woman, his only domestic.

The place was as unpretending as possible, but a single glance on entering showed it to be the abode of a man of refinement. Mouldings of some of the finest metopes in the museum of Athens, some fragments of antique marbles, two or three good etchings, and a charming Gallo-Roman lamp gave to the antechamber, even, the appearance of a little sanctuary. The study, which also served as a parlour, had a good Smyrna carpet on its floor, a great desk, and a few easy chairs ; the walls were hidden by shelves loaded with rows of books, while over the mantelpiece, the space usually filled by a mirror was occupied by a great triptych of the school of Bologna. Curtains of cheerful hues, a balcony filled with flowers, small tables strewn with souvenirs of travel, albums, sketches, and photographs, contributed to give the apartment an attractive and home-like appearance.

All these details were interesting, but what interested us still more was to find M. Pellerin, our master and our hero, in working costume, to wit : jacket of soft blue cotton cloth, gray trousers coming down over the foot, slippers, and, who would have believed it ! a long pipe in his mouth. What would the rhetoric class of the Lycée Montaigne have given for a sight of its professor in private life !

We appreciated our privilege, and were so affected that we were hardly able to converse. But M. Pellerin quickly put us at ease and showed himself the genial companion of other days.

“ I do not ask you to smoke a cigarette with me,” he laughingly said, “ although my Turkish tobacco is as good as can be found anywhere. You know my belief : to allow young men to smoke before they have attained their growth is actually criminal. It is indisputable that tobacco, like all narcotics, arrests physical development ; it is largely



"M. PELLERIN QUICKLY PUT US AT OUR EASE."

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to its deleterious influence that we may attribute the yearly decrease in average stature certified to by the recruiting boards. A celebrated physiologist with whom I crossed from the Piræus to Alexandria remarked to me, 'The European nations will have shrunk to the stature of the Laplanders before a hundred years are out if they continue to let their children smoke before reaching maturity.' You are looking at that paper-weight," M. Pellerin went on, observing Baudouin's eyes fixed on the desk. "It is the foot of an antique statue that I bought from a fisherman of Chios for three drachmæ. Wonderful, is n't it? But speaking of statues, do you still continue to model?"

"Not so much as I could wish."

"That is a pity, for unless I am greatly mistaken there is where your true vocation lies."

"What, monsieur!" Baudouin eagerly asked, "is it your opinion that when one feels an attraction for a particular calling he should embrace it, regardless of whatever obstacles may stand in his way?"

"Undoubtedly. It is a sacred duty, almost, not only toward oneself, but toward one's country. But understand me: the vocation must be genuine, it must rest on substantial facts, not on futile dreams, and the candidate should be in position to prove its reality to others as well as to himself. He may also have imperious duties, an infirm father or a family dependent on him for support; in that case he would not be justified in so tying his hands as to disqualify him from availing himself of any exceptional chances that might offer. But, with this rare exception, assuming that there is a special, definite function for which he is better adapted than for any other, I say that it is his duty to bend his efforts in that direction, and the duty of those around him to assist him."

“And you would advise me,” Baudouin continued, in a voice that trembled with emotion, “to give my attention to art in preference to any other occupation?”

“Certainly, if you feel the vocation and if, as I believe, you have the strength and courage for the conflict. You had best give me some of your designs and attempts at sculpture so that I may show them to competent judges; I will let you know what they think of them. But will you excuse me if I retire to my room and dress?”

M. Pellerin was soon ready, and, descending the Champs-Élysées on foot together, we struck into the Billancourt road.

“Well!” he said, as soon as we were fairly under way, “let’s have a little talk about your affairs. You are not altogether satisfied with your standing in the lycée, and are not quite as successful in your compositions in Latin prose and verse as you once were — is that so? Ah, you have foemen worthy of your steel! The class is not an exceptionally bright one, taken as a whole, but some of its members are hard ones to compete with. Come, put your hands on your hearts and tell me this: have you been working industriously since the beginning of the year?”

“I only came to the Lycée Montaigne a month ago,” observed Baudouin.

“I know that; I was speaking more particularly to Besnard.”

“Faith,” I replied, “I am afraid it would be too much like a fib if I were to say yes. But it is so discouraging to come up from the province, where one had always been accustomed to be among the first of the class, and find oneself sent down to the centre!”

“Yes, I am acquainted with that sensation; it is not pleasant. But there is something that should be even yet

more hateful to you, and that is to remain content with that inferior rank."

"Believe me, monsieur, nothing would please me better than to leave it for a higher ; but what am I to do?"

"What are you to do? It is perfectly simple. Remember Newton's answer to the lady who asked him how he came to discover the law of gravitation: 'By thinking of it,' he said. Well, when you give yourself a problem which, I think you will admit, is considerably less difficult, that of being first in Latin composition or in history, the way to solve it is very much the same,—you must think of it!"

"But I do think of it; I think of nothing else from morning till night, and yet —"

"The trouble is that you don't think in the right way. It is not enough to say to yourself, 'I should like to be first,' although the aspiration in itself is perfectly legitimate. What you want above all to keep asking yourself is, '*How* can I get to be first?'"

"Yes, but the answer is hard to find."

"Not at all. Ask yourself why you were first in Latin composition at Châtillon."

"Because I committed fewer barbarisms and solecisms than my comrades."

"Very good. Do you commit more barbarisms and solecisms at Paris than you did at Châtillon?"

"I flatter myself that I do not."

"Do you commit more than, say, Dutheil?"

"I do not think so. M. Auger himself did me the justice to acknowledge that I write Latin correctly."

"Good. You write as correctly as the others, and yet you are not first. It must be, therefore, that at Montaigne it is not a question of not committing solecisms

and barbarisms,—and there are twenty students in the class who don't,—but of expressing oneself more elegantly than the others, of saying in appropriate language things that command attention.”

“Of course.”

“Well, there you have the whole secret. Writing the Latin of the Augustan age.”

“That is easier said than done!” said I, with a laugh.

“Why so? Who is the most elegant writer of Latin prose, in your opinion?”

I reflected a moment, then doubtfully suggested:

“Cicero, in his ‘Letters?’”

“Your taste is not so bad! Well, write like Cicero; you will be sure you are on the right track then.”

“But how am I to do it, I ask again?”

“Simply by reading and re-reading Cicero’s ‘Letters,’ noting and carefully remembering his style of writing, his chosen expressions, his turns of thought, the words he avoids using, the characteristic locutions that you find recurring constantly in his works. Little by little these details will become familiar to you to the extent that they will become incorporated with your mental structure. Correct phrasing in Latin will also serve to give your ideas a Latin bent. Your style will be benefited by becoming broader and more stately, and in a sense more authentic. You will accustom yourself to think in Ciceronian Latin, which is the great desideratum. And then, according as you shall have brought more or less intelligence and ardour to this preparatory process, the result will be good or indifferent, but in any event, so far as Latinity goes, it cannot fail to be superior to the style that you have involved from your own inner consciousness.”

“But what you suggest is simply a labour of imitation.”

“Yes, so far as form is concerned. Would you aspire to invent a new Latin language better than Cicero’s? What can you do better than follow in his footsteps? Ask Baudouin how he learned to draw; by copying from the best models, he will tell you.”

The scales dropped from my eyes. I began to have glimpses of the light.

“What I have been saying,” M. Pellerin went on, “relates only to style, and style is not everything. There is the matter of the composition, its fundamental woof to be created, or rather to be arranged, since you are furnished with the materials, and that, also, requires a special training. You should accustom yourself to analyze the subject thoroughly, to extract from it all that it contains, to infuse into it the new elements that your memory and your imagination suggest to you, and it is unnecessary to say that in this respect you will find your historical studies, and, in fact, your reading of every description, of singular assistance to you. But style is a matter of the highest importance, do not forget that. A theme well written and carefully thought out is never commonplace.”

M. Pellerin had said his say, and I reflected in silence on the counsels he had given me. I promised myself to turn them to account at once. Thanks to this clue of Ariadne, I at last saw a prospect of finding a way out of the labyrinth in which I had been wandering for the last three months.

As for Baudouin, he had remained completely absorbed in the contemplation of what our dear master had said to him concerning the choice of a profession. When he saw that we had finished talking he made haste to bring the conversation back to the subject that lay so near his heart.



“Monsieur,” he asked, “you were saying a while ago that it is our duty to follow our vocation ?”

“Yes, that is my belief. But another thing that I believe is that we should go to work scientifically, so to speak, to find out what that vocation is, and not let it be confounded with an idle fancy or the caprice of a moment. Shall I tell you what, in my opinion, is the greatest evil that oppresses men’s lives? It is that they do not sufficiently investigate the reasons which lead them to embrace one career in preference to another. It is too often the case that chance, the merest accident, insignificant details of dress, a matter of buttons and gold lace, determine their choice. What folly! To enter, without proper consideration, a profession that one is to follow for his whole life! To abandon oneself, so to speak, to the hazard of a die, under circumstances that call for the most mature deliberation, the most serious reflection! It is deplorable, not only for the individual, but for the entire body of society. For there are few men who are not endowed with the capacity to do, and do well, some one particular thing; and the great point for them, as well as for their neighbours, is to see that they are given that special work to do, and no other. On the one hand, they will find their reward in the consciousness of a task well performed, together with those material advantages which always spring from superiority in any one branch; on the other, society will derive the benefit to which it is entitled for its money, that of being well served.”

“That is plain as day,” exclaimed Baudouin.

“Is it not ridiculous,” M. Pellerin pursued, “to see a young man, who, at the utmost, is capable of copying addresses, serving as lieutenant in a cavalry regiment! Or another, who might have made a first-class sailor, totting

up columns of figures in a banker's office? The loss is twofold, — the nation and the individual both are losers. I maintain that the efforts of educational bodies should be directed to ascertaining the true vocation of every child and then encouraging him to pursue it. The united efforts of the family, the teachers, and the pupil himself, should be concentrated on that one great purpose."

"But how will you proceed to acquaint yourself with each one's specific aptitudes?" I asked.

"Oh, there is a very simple way, one among twenty. It is the device of 'coefficients,' that is employed in competitive examinations for the State schools. I have often wondered why this method was so seldom utilized."

"There is something in physics about the coefficient of dilatation —"

"Well, the coefficients that I speak of are of the same nature, applied to the intellectual faculties. Each examination has its own particular list of topics, has it not, in accordance with the nature of the acquirements required by each school? We will take the list of Saint-Cyr as an example. The candidates are examined in arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, mechanics, geography, and many other things besides. But all the branches in this list are not of the same importance in the judges' eyes; the weight that each branch is to possess in determining the standing of the aspirant is fixed by what is called its number. History is numbered six, Latin translation five, German three, drawing in India ink two, and the various other subjects at higher or lower figures. On the other hand, the candidate receives, on each subject, a mark corresponding to his proficiency. This mark, represented by a number of points, may be *very bad*, from zero to four points, *bad*, from four to seven, *middling*, from seven to

ten,—and finally the various degrees of excellence, culminating at twenty. The examiners multiply the number of points obtained by the candidate in each subject by the corresponding coefficient, and the product gives the candidate's total number of points, and determines his standing among his competitors. Is the working of the system clear to you?"

"Perfectly. But I don't see—"

"Wait a moment. I know what you mean,—we are coming to it. Every profession rests on the application of faculties and special attainments, to which is attributed an importance of their own. That being the case, it is the duty of every one to subject himself to frequent and severe examinations with a view to determining in what direction it is advisable to bend his energies while his education is going on, and to make his choice in conformity with the results of such examinations. Supposing his inclination to be for the military career, he will not decide to try for Saint-Cyr, unless, in addition to the indispensable physical qualifications, he has a fair chance of scoring a respectable number of points in trigonometry, geography, and German, all these branches counting heavily in the competition, on account of the size of their coefficients. If he is strong in mechanics, he will find it to his advantage to turn to the industrial professions. And if all his triumphs are gained in literature or history, instead of vegetating in the rear ranks of a scientific career why not embrace one of the liberal professions?"

"But, monsieur, every one cannot aspire to reach the topmost position in his calling."

"If by that you mean to say that every one cannot expect to *reach* it you are quite right. But I for my part can see no reason why every one should not *aspire* to it, at

any rate at the happy age when one is beginning his apprenticeship. The ambition to do well that which one has to do is a powerful incentive in the lives of nations as well as men. Do you not think that if all the young men who enter Saint-Cyr were firmly resolved to do their level best to become generals of division, and were convinced that they could attain their end only through application, merit, and service rendered, the standard of excellence of our army would be materially raised? It is the same with all callings and professions. And that is why it is of such supreme importance to exercise all our caution and wisdom in making our selection, and, once the selection made, to devote ourselves soul and body to making it a success."

M. Pellerin had much more to say to us on this interesting subject, so important a factor in the future of young men, although the attention they give it is generally of the most superficial description. Then, as we pursued our way, our talk was of Châtillon and our old comrades. One was at the Naval School, another was pursuing his legal or medical studies; this one had entered one of the bureaus of the State as supernumerary; that one had gone into trade. Verschuren was the only one present with us at the Lycée Montaigne.

"And Mounerol?" M. Pellerin inquired.

Mounerol was a former schoolmate of ours whom he had once assisted to a free scholarship in the lycée at Châtillon,—a poor boy of the streets, who had speedily developed into one of our most formidable rivals.

"Mounerol took five prizes last year, but I don't know what has become of him," I replied. "There was some talk of keeping him at the lycée on the chance of an ushership becoming vacant."

“He is a brave little fellow,” said M. Pellerin, “and is certain to make his mark. Do you remember what a droll chap he was, and how everybody in the city called him Criquet? His good old grandfather is living still, I trust?”

“Père Plaisir?—livelier than ever, and immensely proud of his boy’s success. He still sells waffles at the end of the Cours. There is another one who has not forgotten you, monsieur! The last time I saw him he asked about you.”

CHAPTER XIV.

RISE AND FALL OF THE SPECTRE-STUDENT.

WITH M. Pellerin as my master and Baudouin for running mate I was myself again once more, and buckled down to work in earnest. How pleasant my task seemed to me now, and how I should have reproached myself had I failed for a single day to prefix *Lege Quæso* to my exercise! M. Pellerin was not indulgent toward my style, far from it; but, I know not how it was, nothing coming from him ever hurt or offended me. On the contrary, all his observations were welcomed, and appeared to me stamped with the hall mark of the purest taste.

I was not long in assuming a more respectable place in the class than during the first trimestre, and that constituted an increased incentive for emulation. I bade an eternal farewell to idle loiterings, desultory readings, and all similar forms of dissipation. Constantly poring over my books and papers, not only did I strive to perform to their satisfaction the tasks assigned me by my masters, but I made it my business to go to the bottom of every doubtful question, to overcome every difficulty, and above all to have no idle moments in my day.

One might naturally suppose that nobody had any call to interfere in such a labour of reform, and that I was free to work as hard and long as I saw fit. However, there was one of my classmates, Lecachey, who was

unable to forgive me for my metamorphosis. It assumed in his eyes the proportions of a personal affront.

At first he restricted himself to greeting me with his stupid gibes when he saw that I no longer sat near him in the class-room and was evidently at pains to avoid him in the fencing school and elsewhere outside the limits of the school.

“Is it true that you are aiming to be a savant with a long name ending in *us*?” he would say when he succeeded in cornering me at recess. “That is very ill-advised, my dear boy; you should leave it to the pedants,” etc., etc.

When finally he saw that his inanities had no effect to influence me, and that I preferred M. Pellerin’s instruction and M. Aveline’s lectures to his brilliant conversation, he became almost insulting. I resented these attacks, and soon we were, if not totally estranged, on terms of decided coolness toward each other.

About this time an incident that had serious consequences occurred in the class in mathematics.

Thomereau, always on the lookout for a mystification, had conceived one of stupendous proportions at the expense of M. Desbans. His invention in this instance was, I must confess, extremely droll, and our dear master himself has often spoken of it since as one of the most ingenious tricks ever devised by the fertile brain of the mischief-loving young rascal of a schoolboy.

It consisted in creating, for the nonce, an imaginary student, *Forestons* by name, who came to play a rôle in the class that was absolutely fantastic.

The mechanism of the joke was of the simplest. All that Thomereau had done was to prepare for the recitation an elementary problem, at the head of which was written

in bold characters the name, Forestons. The exercise was collected with the others at the beginning of the recitation and handed to M. Desbans. At the following lesson it came back in the professor's hand-bag with annotations by his hand, and, in common with the other exercises, became the object of critical remark. Forestons, for good and sufficient reasons, made no reply to the master's uncomplimentary observations. M. Desbans passed on to the next paper, and the curtain fell on the first act of the comedy.

When, for the third time, the invisible Forestons presented himself before the tribunal of the class, it cost us all a mighty effort to restrain our laughter. And, even then, we succeeded so imperfectly that M. Desbans looked at us in amazement.

It was in vain that Baudouin, who was now taking private lessons in mathematics with me, and shared my affection for our master, expressed his disapproval of the indecorous and too long protracted pleasantry. All was unavailing.

Now it came to pass that, while M. Desbans was reviewing the exercises one day, he paused at the paper of the Spectre-student.

"Monsieur Forestons, your exercise is better to-day than usual," he said; "I should like to be assured that you reached the solution of your problem without assistance. Be so kind as to go to the blackboard and repeat the demonstration."

Forestons, naturally, did not comply. M. Desbans reiterated his request.

"Forestons has just this minute gone out!" said Thomereau, and a stifled laugh ran through the class. The pleasantry seemed to have lost none of its freshness.

“Ah! M. Forestons has gone out, has he?” M. Desbans replied. “Well, do you go find him for me.”

What was to be done? The best course, undoubtedly, would have been for some courageous individual to rise in his place and disclose to M. Desbans the absurd mystification in which the whole class was implicated. But there was not one of us dared do it.

Several minutes passed, in expectancy. How would Thomereau manage to extricate himself from his dilemma? Meantime, we were beginning to pluck up a little courage and tell ourselves that M. Desbans, with his usual absent-mindedness, would soon have forgotten his request, when, all at once, the door of the room opened and Thomereau walked in; but *quantum mutatus!* a transformed, transmogrified, transmuted Thomereau, whom few of us recognized at first.

His buffoon instincts had served him well, unhappy youth! He had made himself almost unrecognizable. With a day-scholar's overcoat draped over his tunic, his shirt collar pulled up on a level with his ears, his long locks plastered down upon his forehead and temples by liberal applications of water from the pump in the courtyard, he protruded his lips and stuck out his chin, wrinkled his nose, and squinted his eyes. The effect was at once grotesque and horrible. At sight of him, a laugh, that no one attempted to restrain, rose from the benches.

M. Desbans suspended his demonstration for a moment, looked at the new arrival with his great introspective eyes, and then resumed the thread of his discourse and finished his reasoning.

We still continued to hope that things would remain where they were, and that he would forget his fancy. But on this occasion his memory was more tenacious.

“Well! Monsieur Forestons,” he said, “have you returned in safety from your excursion? Please go to the blackboard.”

No one was laughing now. Thomereau, with a front of brass, rose, descended the few steps that lay between him and the board, and, still wearing his insufferable grimace, took his position at the post of danger.

“As I said just now to your comrades,” M. Desbans resumed, “I have some doubts as to the originality of your work. I think I remember to have heard that you sometimes received assistance from your comrades, and I should like to see what you will do with a very elementary problem. Be so good as to take down the following data.”

Thomereau took the chalk and stationed himself before the blackboard in such a way that his face, while hidden from the professor, was visible in profile to us. He affected to be at ease, but it is my opinion that he was beginning to regret his senseless caper.

“Ten students of rhetoric,” M. Desbans went on, “write from dictation, during two hours of detention in the schoolroom, a total of three thousand six hundred and sixty verses. How many verses will seventy-five students, writing with the same speed as the others, have written at the end of four detentions of three hours each? You see the problem is a perfectly simple one, an example in the rule of three. I am waiting to hear what you have to say.”

We, too, were waiting, and were even beginning to wonder if the peculiar phraseology of the example might not indicate a menace directed against us. Thomereau, doubtless, had the same suspicion, for the hand that traced the figures on the blackboard was far from steady. He

began, however, with what confidence he might, in the usual singsong formula.

“If ten students in two hours write three thousand six hundred and sixty verses,” he declaimed, in a cavernous voice, “one student will write in two hours that total divided by ten, and in one hour the quotient of this first division divided by two.”

“Very well reasoned, Monsieur Forestons,” here interjected M. Desbans. “I see that you have turned your instruction in arithmetic to good account. Go on.”

Thomereau, seeing matters assume such a satisfactory aspect, seemed to receive a new lease of life. He raised his voice, — in volume but not in pitch, however, for it still seemed to emanate from his boots, — and continued :

“Having ascertained how many verses one student writes in an hour, a simple sum in multiplication will tell us how many seventy-five students will write in the same time : seventy - five students writing at the same rate of speed during four detentions of three hours, that is to say during twelve hours, will turn off twelve times more, that is to say the preceding product multiplied by twelve — ”

“Perfect !” exclaimed M. Desbans. “Now perform your operations and let us know the total.”

Thomereau proceeded to his divisions and multiplications, which consumed several minutes. At last he pronounced the result : one hundred and sixty-four thousand seven hundred.

“Very good,” remarked the professor, “and I am delighted to find you so proficient in the rule of three, Monsieur Forestons. You are from the country, probably ? I do not remember ever having seen you before today — ”

Here the class was utterly unable to hold in longer, and gave way to an explosion of boisterous merriment. It

acted like a lash on Thomereau's congenital instinct to play the clown.

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, in tones deeper and more drawling than ever; "I am from Brives-la-Gaillarde, where my father, who fills the respectable position of Inspector of Weights and Measures, taught me from earliest infancy to revere the rule of three —"

Our delight was verging on delirium, when all at once we saw M. Desbans rise, stride up to the now thoroughly frightened Thomereau, seize him by the collar and hustle him to the door, saying, in a distinct voice:

"Very well, Monsieur Forestons! you will present yourself before the proctor and tell him, with my compliments, how you were eliminated from my class!"

A funereal silence succeeded this unexpected speech. We all felt that we were, to a certain extent, accomplices in Thomereau's misdeeds; we saw how culpable we had been in abetting the mystification that had been carried on for two or three weeks at the expense of a good and learned man. A fine thing it was for us to do, truly, miserable greenhorns and idle vagabonds that we were, to make game of a savant of M. Desbans's distinction! But his turn had come now, and all that remained for us to do was to bow our heads to the storm.

"You know me well enough to know, young gentlemen," he said, turning and facing us, "that I shall not gratify you by manifesting vexation at so pitiable a pleasantry; there was really neither wit nor daring in attempting it on me, who am wholly unsuspecting of evil and devoted to your instruction. You enlisted, seventy-five strong, in this enterprise, and I am sorry that I cannot congratulate you on it. When you are men and no longer blackguards, you will better understand how little glory there was attaching

to it. In the meantime, I call your attention to the fact that you have violated in my person the respect you owe your masters, and for that I am obliged to punish you. I shall request the proctor to sentence the entire class, for four consecutive Thursdays, to three hours' detention in its room, and that will afford you an opportunity to verify the correctness of your comrade's solution of the problem in rule of three."

Whereon, M. Desbans returned to the blackboard, took the chalk, and with perfect serenity proceeded to the demonstration of another theorem.

We looked at one another in dismay. I, for my part, was thoroughly ashamed of having been accessory, even by my silence, to the ridiculous business, and I wondered how I should dare show my face in M. Desbans's sanctum for my private lesson.

My comrades for the most part seemed occupied with other considerations, and until the end of the recitation the whispering among them was continuous. I learned the reason after the dismissal of the class.

"It is strange," said some one, "that Tronc-de-Cône should have caught on to the affair so quickly."

"*Parbleu!* he has not the sense to have discovered it himself," said a voice behind me that I recognized as Lecachey's. "It was doubtless one of his private pupils who put a flea in his ear."

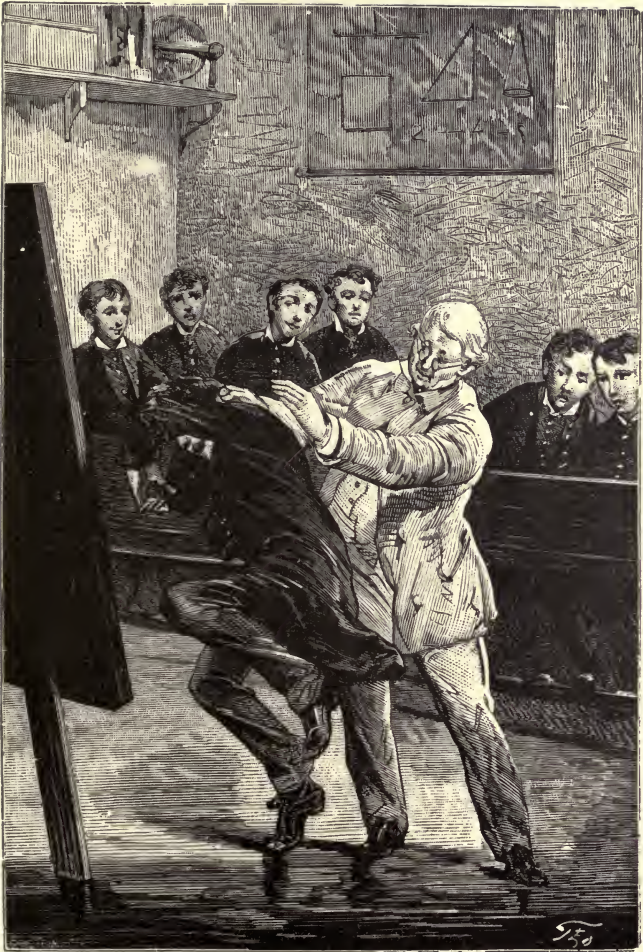
I turned around, my face pale with indignation.

"Is that intended for me?" I asked.

He appeared a little disconcerted, and made answer that I was not M. Desbans's only private pupil.

"I am, with the exception of Baudouin!" I cried.

We had stopped a short way from the door, and a small crowd had immediately gathered round us. The presence



“M. DESBANS COLLARING THOMEREAU.”



of these witnesses acted as a stimulus to Lecachey's pride.

"Faith, then, if you wish to hear the truth," he insolently said, "yes, I believe it was Baudouin who let the cat out of the bag—"

Before he had time to finish his sentence, I drew off and landed on his face with as scientific a right-hander as I ever delivered in my life. The mischief was done before I had even resolved to hit him. To hear Baudouin insulted by that asinine snob was more than I could bear.

Lecachey had so little expected the attack that he acted as if his wits had taken leave of him.

"*What's that? What's that?*" was all he could enunciate.

"If you have n't had enough, I have more in readiness for you!" I shouted at him. "And if you are not satisfied after I have had my innings, Baudouin will take his!"

At that moment the proctor made his appearance on the scene of conflict. I was dragged away from the field by my comrades, while Lecachey was taken in charge by some of the day scholars. I saw the proctor stop and question him.

Baudouin had remained behind to speak with M. Desbans,—possibly of the morning's incidents,—and had no knowledge of what was taking place outside the class-room. I cautioned my friends to say nothing to him.

"He would spoil Lecachey's good looks if he should hear what the miserable little cad accuses him of. Baudouin never attempted to conceal his disgust for Thomereau's mystification, but as for giving it away to Tronc-de-Cône, never! I can vouch for him as for myself."

I was pleased to see that there was not one of my comrades who did not share my opinion in this respect. Within a few days Baudouin had become a universal favourite, for no other reason than the frankness and uprightness of his character. My friends promised me to observe secrecy.

"Well, what did the proctor say to you?" we asked, in chorus, of Thomereau when we saw him next.

"The proctor? Did you think I was such an idiot as to present myself before him?" our little man replied, in a tone of triumph. "I just slipped in here, quietly, and sat out the recitation, and I'll bet that old Tronc-de-Cône has already forgotten the whole business."

He seemed to regard his idea as a stroke of genius.

"Tronc-de-Cône may have forgotten; that is his lookout!" I said to myself; "but as for you, my lad, you would not take so philosophically the tremendous wiggling that he gave you unless your conscience told you you deserved it."

No one would believe, looking at Thomereau, that he had been the inglorious hero of so disreputable an adventure. That lightness of heart and thickness of the epidermis is doubtless a gift peculiar to professional buffoons. I have often noticed in the course of my life that no one is so quick as they to recover from the effect of the various, and not always agreeable, consequences in which their mania for amusing themselves at their neighbours' expense is pretty certain to involve them.

The fellow's effrontery was too much for Baudouin, when he had an opportunity of witnessing it.

"Just see the assurance of the chap who had his ears boxed so recently," he said to me, with unfeigned astonishment.

As for me, I knew that no one is apt to look back with pleasure on the part he has borne in an execution of this nature, and that the surviving impression is always a painful one. But my attention during recess was chiefly given to keeping Baudouin occupied, in order that no echo of my affair with Lecachey might get to his ears. The behaviour of the class was perfect. No one made the least allusion to what had occurred in the courtyard.

But the incident was not to be allowed to drop in that way, unfortunately. We had scarcely taken our seats in the recitation-room when Anselme opened the door, and shouted :

“ Monsieur Besnard ! Monsieur Thomereau ! will appear before the principal — ”

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE PRINCIPAL'S ROOM.—THE LECACHEY FAMILY.—
A PETITION.

TO be summoned before the principal was, under any circumstances, a matter of no small consequence. Such an honour had never been conferred on me during my residence at the Lycée Montaigne, but that I was to share it now with Thomereau was certainly ominous of evil.

It behooved me to put the best face possible upon the matter, however, and I flatter myself that my step was pretty firm as, under Anselme's guidance, I threaded the corridors that led to the dread precincts.

As for Thomereau, his courage seemed suddenly to have deserted him. He showed no disposition to laugh, and his punning proclivities were in abeyance. I even thought I could detect a suspicious trembling in the region of his knees. At all events, he walked very slowly, and seemed in no hurry to reach his journey's end.

"What the devil can the principal want with us?" he asked, in a lugubrious tone.

"*Parbleu*, the thing is plain enough," said I, myself not feeling particularly at ease, "it was your beastly Forestons who secured the invitation for us."

If we had retained the least doubt on this point, it was dissipated the moment we set foot in the sanctum of the principal. He was seated, calm and grave, before his

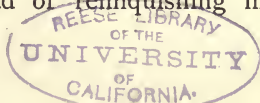
great desk of white oak, in the middle of a spacious study, whose walls were lined with shelves loaded with books and receptacles for documents. M. Desbans and the proctor occupied chairs beside him. Lecachey was standing at a window, with a rather chopfallen expression on his face; his left cheek was noticeably redder than the other.

“Come forward, gentlemen,” M. Montus said to us, upon our entrance. Then, in the same breath, addressing Thomereau :

“This is not the first time,” he said, in severe tones, “that your vagaries have been brought to my attention, but this one passes the limit of endurance. Whence could you have derived the pitiful assurance to contrive so scandalous a mystification, and employ it to the annoyance of one of your masters—and such a master! He who, above all, reflects honour on the lycée by his superior merit, and the fame of his achievements in the field of science! Oh, monsieur, if you have the least sentiment of decency left in you, you should have been overwhelmed with shame at the mere thought of committing an action,—I will not say so offensive, for nothing emanating from you can injure M. Desbans, but so low and unmanly—in one word, so *impudent*.”

Thomereau was lividly pale. M. Desbans's eyes pleaded for mercy for the culprit.

“Your fault is so grave,” the principal continued, “that my first impulse was to telegraph your parents to come and remove you from the school. If I did not at once carry my purpose into execution it is because M. Desbans himself has interceded in your favour and urges me to grant a respite. Rest assured that if I yield to his instances it will not be from any consideration for you. I am not certain that, instead of relinquishing my first



intention, it is not my duty to rid Division No. 1 of a pupil who has always been a centre of mischief and disorder. As it is, however, your professor himself insists that mercy be shown you. Moved by a sentiment that does him honour, he objects to being the indirect — and certainly entirely innocent — cause of a sentence of expulsion that would forever be a blot upon your future. I ought not to leave you uninformed, monsieur, that he would not even have condescended to complain of your transgression had not the proctor's attention been drawn to the sorry prank by the affray which resulted from it."

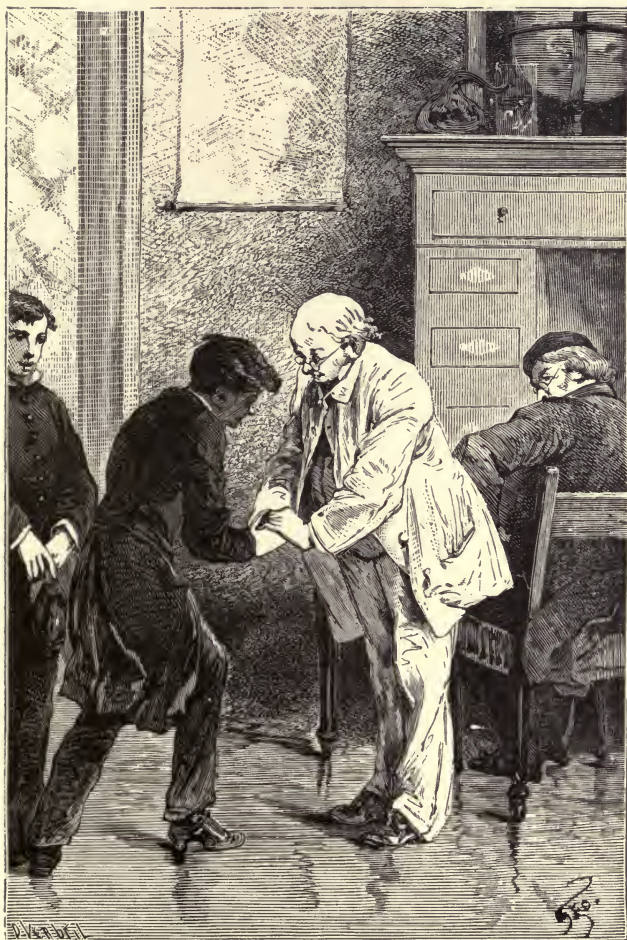
Here M. Montus looked at me in a way that gave me food for reflection.

"So, for this once, I have again decided to be lenient with you. Your punishment will be confinement within the limits for the remainder of the term. But bear in mind that you have only one fault more to commit, and that on the first serious complaint sentence of expulsion will be pronounced against you, from which there will be no appeal. Thank M. Desbans for his kindness which you have done so little to deserve, after which you may join your classes."

"Crestfallen as a fox made prisoner by a hen," Thomereau advanced a step toward M. Desbans and muttered some almost unintelligible words. Our dear master seemed hardly less embarrassed by his rôle than the malefactor himself, but in the goodness of his heart he was not long in finding a gracious word to say.

"Do not let this vex you more than it vexes me," he said, extending his loyal hand to Thomereau, "and I promise you that we shall continue to be good friends."

Then, as my turn was coming, he thought to spare me the humiliation of being admonished in his presence; with



“CRESTFALLEN AS A FOX MADE PRISONER BY A HEN.”



a comprehensive salutation to the assemblage he left the room, the principal accompanying him to the door of the antechamber.

“As for you, Monsieur Besnard,” M. Montus resumed when he had returned and seated himself at his desk, “your offence is not of the same nature as Thomereau’s, but it cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed. It is not for me to inquire into the motive which induced you to commit so violent and brutal an assault on one of your comrades.”

Lecachey was present still, a silent listener to a conversation that had in it so little to flatter his self-esteem. He kept his eyes fixed on the floor, and appeared totally uninterested in what was going on.

I don’t know what instinct told me that he must have laid a complaint before the proctor, and that but for him the affair would never have reached headquarters. At the same moment the thought of the base accusation he had brought against Baudouin recurred to my mind. These tumultuous sentiments inspired me with a boldness that to me was unusual.

“Mr. Principal,” I suddenly said, “I feel it my duty to say to you in all frankness that I cannot bring myself to think that I was in the wrong, and that upon a repetition of the circumstances I doubt if I should be able to restrain an impulse that, in my opinion, was entirely justifiable. It was not my own honour I was defending, but a friend’s, whom I could not stand by and in cold blood hear outraged in that wherein he is most invulnerable, his loyalty of character.”

The principal shot a glance at Lecachey, who dared not raise his eyes, and I thought I saw a faint indication of a smile upon his lips, but if so he immediately repressed it.

“I have nothing to do with your motives,” he said, and his tone was less harsh than were his words; “all I have to consider is the facts as they are. By your own admission you have been guilty of a breach of the peace, a thing that under no circumstances can I tolerate in the lycée. All that remains for me to do is to inflict the penalty, which in your case will be two months’ confinement to quarters, and you may consider yourself fortunate to get off so easily. I know that you are applying yourself, and are one of the best scholars of your class,” M. Montus was pleased to add. “It is for that reason you have escaped a severer punishment.”

He dismissed me with a nod of the head, and I retired, in company with Thomereau, who by this time was pretty well recovered from his panic.

“Tronc-de-Cône is a good devil all the same!” he said to me as we were leisurely strolling back to Division No. 1.

The corridor we were pursuing was of considerable length; we were nearing its further extremity when our attention was attracted by the report of a closing door, and turning, we saw Lecachey emerging from the office of the principal. Doubtless he had in turn been receiving his compliment, brief, and to the point.

At that instant Lecachey raised his eyes and recognized us.

He hesitated a moment and seemed to be debating, inwardly, whether he should advance, but with sudden determination he rapidly retreated his steps and took refuge in the principal’s antechamber. That was sufficient to send us off at speed in the opposite direction, toward our class-room.

And that was the last I ever saw of Lecachey.

Whether it was that the central authority had meted out to him a punishment for his share in the squabble that he did not choose to submit to, or whether he was not particularly desirous to face Baudouin and me again, after this day he discontinued his attendance at the lycée.

I subsequently learned that he had informed his father that he had amassed all the learning necessary for his happiness, and did not see any necessity for completing his studies in rhetoric. M. Lecachey had never been able to oppose the caprices, however unreasonable, of his illustrious offspring. He was reputed on every hand to be a man of great intelligence and remarkable aptitude for business; starting with moderate means, he had, in a few years, made his banking house one of the first in Paris; but he lacked firmness, and allowed himself to be ruled in everything by his wife and son, the latter a headstrong, idle youth, the former a frivolous, empty-headed woman, addicted to luxury and display, living in a constant turmoil of fêtes and entertainments, and whose sole object in life was to outshine her rivals with her expensive gowns and smart equipages.

There might be something to be said in excuse of this last-named point, however, owing to the immense prosperity of the banking concern, and the alleged necessity for a certain amount of public show and ostentation.

“It is my wife whom I charge with spending my money,” the banker said to his friends.

But for his weakness toward his son there was no excuse, for it was not an excuse to believe that, because he was sole heir to a handsome fortune, he was entitled to live all his life an ignorant and useless member of society.

Be that as it may, however, on the present occasion M. Lecachey interposed some feeble objections, urging his

son to take his degree, and enter the law school, but in the end yielded to the young man's arguments, with the proviso that he should at once take his place behind a desk in the paternal banking house.

Before the Easter holidays he had already been promoted chief clerk in his father's private office. I often wondered if he had a man specially attached to his person to correct his faults of spelling and numerous other blunders.

As for me, by the time Thomereau and I had regained the class-room I had ceased to think of my prospective confinement.

But alas! I was obliged to think of it when, Sunday after Sunday, the package of *excats* was handed to M. Valadier, and it contained none for me.

Baudouin had ultimately been apprised of the Lecachey business and its consequences. He had at first maintained that his duty was to share my captivity, but had finally yielded to my instances, and admitted the uselessness of immuring himself in the lycée during hours that might be employed to better advantage. He had long desired to make a thorough inspection of certain collections of prints and original drawings in our museums, where I was less inclined than he to make protracted visits, which frequently resulted in his depriving himself of a pleasure, to spare me a slight inconvenience. It was agreed that henceforth he should devote my days of confinement to these researches.

As for mamma, Aunt Aubert, my father and grandfather, who suffered even more than I did from this long famine of holidays, they fell into the habit of coming twice a week, and spending the noonday recess with me in the parlour.

Aunt Aubert on these occasions never failed to bring me certain jars of sweetmeats and pots of jam, that were appreciated by Baudouin, Verschuren, and particularly by Chavasse, even more gratefully than by me. All through school life I adhered, as far as possible, to the excellent habit of sharing with my comrades. Independently of the very real pleasure that this proceeding afforded me, I discovered in it an advantage that I had not calculated on, a reciprocity of good offices on the part of others. If people only knew how much they lose through selfishness, no one would let himself be mastered by that odious vice.

Returning to my confinement, it was no small affliction, every Sunday morning, to see my comrades, spick and span in all the glory of clean linen, and shining boots, file one by one through the open door at Anselme's vociferous summons, and go forth into the outer world.

Even when they heroically abstained from chaffing me on my miserable lot, and did not congratulate me on the inestimable privilege accorded me of remaining at the lycée, and enjoying the dominical rice-cake, my feelings were anything but cheerful, and I was rather inclined to regard myself as a youthful martyr in the cause of friendship.

But this very thought served to sustain my courage, and inspired me with a certain degree of resignation. Was it not for Baudouin's sake that I was suffering persecution? The affair had not been of my seeking. I had obeyed a perfectly natural sentiment in publicly resenting a slander, publicly uttered against my friend. Doubtless I had done myself an injury, by not being a little more discreet, but to stand still and do nothing would have been treason to my devoted affection for Baudouin. Since I was condemned to spend my days at the lycée there was

but one thing left for me to do : utilize them to the best of my ability by working hard, and thus steal a march on my comrades.

And that is what I set to work to do, with a rather heavy heart, it must be confessed.

One Saturday — it was the Saturday of my second week's captivity — an idea occurred to me, that my modesty alone deters me from qualifying as luminous in its simplicity.

Dutheil and I were accustomed, during the four o'clock recess, to run up for a few minutes to the library of the lycée. It was a great room, whose walls were hidden by books ; its furnishings consisted of a long table with a green baize cover, and a few chairs, and it was under the special charge of a youthful usher. It was open, for one hour daily, to the students in rhetoric and philosophy only. One had to rush up the staircase, call for the books he wished to see, and make his notes with headlong speed.

Brief as were these visits between a luncheon bolted standing and afternoon recitation, they always left with me a delicious memory. The orderly array of the books in their rich bindings, mathematically aligned on shelves of black varnished wood, the gilded titles, the peaceful quiet of the room, even the odour of the old dusty tomes, — all contributed to inspire in me a sensation of reverence and deep-seated joy, and one of my regrets was that we were not permitted to remain longer in this sanctuary. What would I not have given to be allowed to pass one whole day there and rummage at will among the shelves !

On the Saturday I spoke of, just as the drum beat recalling us to our studies, something prompted me to ask the youthful guardian if I might not be allowed to use the

library on Sundays, seeing that I was under sentence of confinement.

"There is only one thing to prevent," he replied, with a laugh: "the library is closed on that day of the week. I am not under sentence of confinement, thank the Lord, and Sunday is my holiday!"

I returned to the class-room in a despondent frame of mind. My imagination had drawn a delicious picture of the joy that would be mine if I might only spend my Sunday among those books instead of in the dormitory.

"Why should I not write to the principal and prefer a request in form?" I suddenly asked myself. "There is nothing wrong in my desire, and if the thing is contrary to the regulations, why, there will be no great harm done."

I immediately sat down and applied myself to composing a petition.

"It must be in Latin!" I said to myself, developing my idea. "It will be more likely to receive attention."

So I explained to M. Montus, *eximie prætor*, that being by his orders reduced to captivity until Easter (or the sixth day after the ides of April), I should be glad to be allowed to utilize that trying period by extending the circle of my literary attainments. In a word, permission to use the library on Sundays would fill the measure of my desires, and complete my earthly felicity, and if he would accede to my request, he should always occupy a position in my heart among the benefactors to humanity.

It was nearly seven o'clock before I had put the last finishing touch to my production, and on my way down to supper I gave it to Anselme, exhorting him to deliver it at once.

It so happened that the principal was making one of his periodical visits of inspection to the refectory that

evening, and was walking with the proctor, in the lane that separated the rows of tables. I saw him open the envelope that Anselme handed him, and smile as he ran his eye over my letter. It is hardly necessary to say that I awaited his decision with anxiety.

He was too kind to keep me in suspense, and, as we rose from table at the conclusion of the repast, beckoned to me.

“I grant your request,” he said, with a smile. “Your idea is a good one, and I am pleased to see that you propose to profit by the lessons of adversity. The only condition I impose is that you use care in handling the books in the library, where you will be alone, for it would be unjust to deprive the attendant of his holiday for your sole benefit. Anselme will give you the key to-morrow morning at ten o’clock, and it will rest with you to merit a continuance of the favour on the following Sundays.”

I bowed respectfully, and followed my comrades. My feet seemed hardly to touch the stairs, so lightly did I fly up them to the dormitory. What was my captivity to me, now! I was sure that my time would be profitably spent.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROPER METHOD OF TEACHING HISTORY. — CON-
CIONES LATINÆ. — MR. MURCHISON'S IDEAS. —
EASTER. — PANADA.

THE next day, about two o'clock, I was ensconced in the embrasure of one of the windows of the library, and so absorbed in what I was reading that I did not hear the door open. I raised my head at the sound of a familiar voice.

“Hallo, is that you there in the window, M. Besnard?” said M. Aveline. “I came here to look up some authorities in the Bollandist collection, — perhaps you would n't mind lending me your assistance.”

It was with great pleasure that I placed my services at the disposal of my professor in history. I found in short order the big volume that he named to me, laid it open on the table, and M. Aveline was at liberty to go ahead and hunt up the quotation that he needed. It took him some minutes, during which time I remained at his side, and we kept up a disconnected conversation.

“How comes it that you are at the lycée today?” he asked me.

I had to explain to him that I was paying the penalty of a misdemeanour.

“Ah, so! And you make good use of your time, I am happy to see. What were you reading when I came in?”

M. Aveline glanced at a chair near the place I had been occupying, on which I had piled fifteen or twenty volumes of Rollins, Mézerai's "History," Froissart's "Chronicles," Chateaubriand's "Martyrs," and I know not what works besides.

"Let me give you a bit of advice in return for your politeness," he continued, with a smile. "If you wish to make profitable use of your time, in an educational point of view, I mean, as well as in regard to developing your intelligence, do not scatter your efforts and do not read at random. Lay out for yourself a line of historical study. Select separately each day an epoch, a period, some particular event or series of events, choose two or three historians who have treated the matter competently, and read, successively, the chapters that relate to your special subject, taking copious notes, particularly where there is a divergence of opinion. Then, this preliminary labour accomplished, sum up for yourself, as briefly but clearly as possible, the inferences you draw from the comparison. Apply this method systematically to all the subjects that you take up, and let me know what you think of it."

"But how shall I know where to look for my authorities?"

"I will very gladly undertake to point them out to you in the beginning, but you will not need my assistance long. You will soon learn what author to refer to in any particular case, and turn to him of your own accord."

"What, monsieur, would you have the goodness —"

"It is for that purpose that I am your professor, and you are aware that that is the foundation of my method of instruction. At each recitation I mention the authors

that may be consulted most advantageously on the lesson of the day. If you desire further information, either in regard to certain portions of that lesson, or concerning a course of study that you may have laid out for yourself, you need never fear to come to me. A professor is only too glad to assist with his advice an industrious and willing pupil."

A quarter of an hour after M. Aveline had left me, I had already mapped out for myself a plan of study and reading for the ensuing Sunday. Up to the present time my only thought had been to derive as much enjoyment as possible from my compulsory seclusion. I suddenly saw the immense advantage that might accrue to me from a system of methodical and well-directed research carried on during these hours of supplementary labour.

From that day the life of the school underwent a change for me, and I can truthfully say that my punishment became a pleasure. I was working with a definite, special end in view. I assigned to myself for each week a certain determinate task, and it was not long before my compositions began to manifest the practical advantage that I derived from it. Those Sunday readings became an actual necessity to me. The thought afforded me extraordinary pleasure that I, a mere schoolboy and only yesterday a thoughtless urchin, was in a position to trace matters to their source, to compare texts, and on the various occurrences of history to obtain, not information at second hand, not the dry and juiceless summaries that are found in the usual manuals and text-books, but the breathing words and detailed opinions of the greatest intellects.

In these auspicious circumstances I felt my intelligence maturing as the ears of grain are expanded and gilded by

the quickening sunshine. My literary style improved, together with my intellectual faculties. Not a day passed that was not marked by a long stride in advance. I saw my way clear before me; I knew where I wished to go, and I advanced steadfastly in that direction.

The passion for *thoroughness* that I had contracted was not confined to history; it spread and grew, and presently extended to all my other studies. I felt how senseless it was to live for years side by side with the greatest writers of antiquity and not extract from them all that they contained. I made it my business to read them attentively, to inform myself as to their lives, to study the principal essays and criticisms on their works, to penetrate, more deeply than I had done hitherto, the spiritual characteristics of the men. And then, to my great delight, I saw that what had been so colourless and, if I must say the word, so tiresome, while confining myself to the daily routine of the class, all at once became the most attractive and interesting of studies. All things were suddenly revealed to me in a new light. Like Aladdin with his wonderful lamp, I proceeded in my cave from enchantment to enchantment.

However, this enlargement of my labours and of my ideas was not without its drawback. It inspired in me, unwittingly, perhaps, a certain contempt for the ordinary exercises of the class, and particularly, as I remember, for the recitation of tasks.

I did not go so far as not to learn them, in the first place because that was a matter that never gave me any trouble, for I had an extremely good memory, and then because for nothing in the world would I have put myself in a false position and exposed myself to a reprimand. But if I learned them it was perfunctorily, and I could

not help protesting *in petto* against what I considered a waste of time.

I opened my mind on the subject, with great frankness, to M. Pellerin one day that he had been obliged to punish a boy for not knowing the first word of his lesson in the *Conciones*.

"Monsieur," I said to him, on the dismissal of the class, in one of those informal conversations that he liked to hold with five or six of us grouped round his desk, "I have a doubt that I should be glad if you would solve. Do you think it is really of advantage to pupils in rhetoric to learn tasks by heart, and might they not employ their time to better purpose? For instance, would it not be more profitable to read a hundred pages of a good author than to addle one's brain trying to learn to repeat, parrot fashion, twenty lines from the *Conciones*?"

M. Pellerin laughed. "That is an objection which I should scarcely have expected from you," he said. "Do you suppose I would impose on you and your comrades a duty whose efficacy had not been clearly demonstrated? No, the mere reading, no matter how attentively, of a hundred pages by a good author can never have the same effect as a lesson committed to memory. In the first place, I should have to be assured that the hundred pages had been actually read, which there is no means of doing, while it is an easy matter for me to ascertain whether the lesson has been learned or not. But outside this question of conscience and performance, can you not see the difference there is between hastily skimming over a certain number of pages of print and the perfect assimilation that results from a task thoroughly mastered? To learn a page by heart, you are obliged to read it over and over,

to get at its very marrow, to grasp its most insignificant details. You make yourself master not only of the writer's thoughts but of his style, and those thoughts, that style, become an integral part of your being. Is not that by itself a result of some importance? Well, that result is only a small fraction of the benefit you derive from memorizing — ”

I looked at M. Pellerin with an astonishment which I made no attempt to conceal.

“In the first place,” he resumed, “the effort required to retain the task exercises your *attention* and accustoms you to concentrate your mental faculties on one specific object. In the second place, it exercises your *memory*, unquestionably one of the most useful attributes of the intelligence and which more than all the rest stands in need of constant cultivation. Finally, it assists in the formation of your *taste*, it increases your stock of facts and judgments. Don't you think that all those benefits compensate for the trouble of memorizing a few lines daily?”

“Certainly,” I quickly replied, impressed by my master's demonstration. “But might we not learn something beside the *Conciones*?”

“The *Conciones*!” M. Pellerin exclaimed. “What! can it be that you are one of those who fail to appreciate that noble work at its true value? Have you fallen into the error, common to so many schoolboys, that causes them to look disdainfully on any text-book that the experience of their instructors places in their hands? Have you never noticed how admirable in every respect the book in question is, and particularly how perfectly it is adapted to its end? Reflect, my lad, that the *Conciones* is the very essence of Titus Livius, Quintus Curtius, Sallust, and Tacitus, that is to say of the four greatest historians in

Latin literature. Latin literature, it is unnecessary for me to remind you, is the parent not only of our language, but of our ideas, our morality, our genius itself. Well! it is the philosophy and the history of that great Roman nation, our predecessor and our legislator, that you have in substance in the *Conciones*, set forth by the pen of its most illustrious writers in prose —”

M. Pellerin paused for a moment, but went on again almost immediately :

“There is more to be said. This résumé is not a dry and impersonal narrative, a bare summary of occurrences and facts. It is a living and breathing discussion of the highest interests of Roman policy. Together with the consuls, the generals, and the senators of the great republic, you penetrate the very heart of the questions that influenced their actions. You are transported to the council hall, to the forum, to the head of conquering armies. You follow them in the discussion of the motives which dictate their actions and direct their conduct. You put yourself, to a certain extent, in their place. The whole scene lives again before you, it is the age, the very abstract and mirror of the time that rise before your vision. Do you think it would be easy to find another book as well calculated to develop, at the same time, your imagination and your judgment, and add the crowning sheaf to your classic studies? Believe me, the *Conciones* could not be readily replaced. To produce it required the profound scholarship, the familiarity with the literature of the ancients, and the didactic genius of a Henri Estienne, second of the name.”

“Do you mean to say that Henri Estienne, the great printer and learned pundit of the sixteenth century, was the author of the *Conciones* ?”

“Certainly. He it was who first conceived the idea of collecting in a single volume the beauties of the four great Roman historians, and that is not the least of the services that he rendered to French literature. I have no hesitation in saying that all Corneille, all Racine, all the great school of political reasoners, and all the century of Louis XV., show very distinctly the influence of the *Conciones*. Although it is not generally known, it is one of the books that have most contributed to impart to classic thought its definitive imprint. In this respect, and in many more besides, it deserves the high place which it holds in our system of instruction, and will continue to hold forever, I hope and trust.”

Thus on occasion would M. Pellerin correct in my views the narrowness arising from an excess of zeal, a fault not uncommon among neophytes.

With M. Aveline and M. Desbans, moreover, he was not the only master by whose councils I profited. For some time past I had seen in the English lessons a new weapon with which to attack the supremacy of Dutheil, the most redoubtable of my rivals. He manifested for the living languages a contempt that was difficult of explanation in one as intelligent and industrious as he, performed his exercises in English perfunctorily without exhibiting the slightest interest, and, as in mathematics, held in his class a secondary place.

Our professor, Mr. Murchison, was a most estimable man, very gentle and polite, very intelligent, with a handsome pair of white side-whiskers, and a complexion rosy as an albino's. His method had a deserved celebrity throughout the university, and he could point with justifiable pride to the fact that he had taught the generations of young Parisians more English than thirty editions of

the most widely circulated dictionary. He spoke French as fluently as his mother tongue, and, except for the two words *syllabe* and *possessif*, which he invariably pronounced *syllable* and *pozè-ssif*, his accent would not have betrayed him as one born beyond the Channel. Add to these details a large share of that national self-complacency for which his countrymen are so eminently distinguished, the opinion that English, being spoken by about two hundred and fifty millions of men, is entitled to the front rank in the hierarchy of languages, and the unalterable conviction that Shakespeare is the mightiest of literary geniuses, past, present, or to come, — in all other respects, an irreproachable master.

He had a number of little methods, personal to himself, for inspiring us with an interest in our work.

For instance, he thought, and quite correctly, too, that, in the study of the modern languages, everything, or pretty nearly everything, must be accomplished through the medium of the ear, and, for that reason, while he was excessively exacting as regarded punctuality in attendance at recitations, the exercises he gave us to do were of the briefest.

The business of the class was almost wholly transacted at the blackboard.

Another of his theories was that, the pupils' faculties being brighter at the beginning than at the end of a lesson, it was desirable to take advantage of that important circumstance. Accordingly, he selected that moment for putting us through the exercises that required most mental effort, instead of employing the first half of the hour in recitation or revising compositions.

He considered the day as lost that did not witness a step taken in advance, and regarded that class as on the



road to ruin whose every member did not carry away with him at the end of the session some fresh acquisition. It was his custom, on our arrival, to write out on the blackboard some terse observation connected with the business of the day, and make us repeat it until he saw that the class had mastered it.

As regards pronunciation, he had a very simple but unerring method, which I often wonder is not more generally employed. It consisted in writing on the blackboard two lines of English prose, reading them aloud, and then making us all repeat them, one after the other, from the first to the last. It took from seven to eight minutes at each recitation, and I cannot tell you what thorough masters of English pronunciation a few months of this drill made us.

Speaking of this, Mr. Murchison used to say that the great fault of teachers of language generally was that they attempted to teach their pupils the sound of separate words, instead of taking the words connected in sentences, which is their normal relation, — a system which causes as much trouble to remember the sound of an isolated word, that is to say in its exceptional condition, as is required to grasp the word fused in a phrase and connected with the adjoining words, which is its natural condition. I have known persons who could take up an English or German newspaper and read it offhand, and yet could not understand a word spoken in one of those idioms. The reason was that their ear had not been early familiarized with the change that the rapid pronunciation of the syllables seems to produce in words that are familiar when taken separately.

Finally, Mr. Murchison had an inflexible rule in regard to compositions, which was to prohibit the use of the dictionary except where absolutely necessary.

“Where is the proof that you have acquired a sufficiently extensive vocabulary,” he said, “if you are not capable of drawing from your own resources the words required for a translation? What you accomplish with the assistance of the dictionary is mere machine work; your theme or version will be more or less successful in proportion to the amount of labour you devote to thumbing its pages; but nothing will prove that you have actually made your own the words which you employ. So, down with the dictionary, when it comes to a trial of ability!”

Such were some of Mr. Murchison’s characteristic notions. Taken in connection with his foreign aspect, the coldness and reserve of his manners, his ultra British habits of dress and bearing, they formed an *ensemble* full of flavour and originality, which contrasted agreeably with the rather colourless tone of our classes and made the hours spent in his room extremely pleasant to me.

Willy-nilly, one had to absorb a certain modicum of English with him; but, as I have said, Dutheil put no life into his work, and that inspired me with the idea of devoting all my energies to a branch that he seemed to be neglecting.

“Would n’t you like to know English?” I said to him one day. “I should think it must be very nice to be able to speak a foreign language.”

“My dear fellow,” he replied with a self-satisfied air, “I am not so ambitious; I shall be content to speak my own correctly.”

“The one thing is no hindrance to the other. You may have a thorough mastery of French and none the less know English.”

“I have no desire that way. English is of no benefit to one, except in trade, and I have no intention of becoming a merchant.”

“You may be compelled to take up business. And then there is an English literature, which it seems to me might tempt your curiosity.”

“I can read it in translations.”

“The inhabitants of a quarter of the earth speak English, and you may take it in your head to travel some day.”

“Good! where is the civilized country where you won't find a French cook to prepare your breakfast, and a Swiss waiter to act as interpreter?”

I said no more, but I adhered to my purpose, and applied myself to my studies under Mr. Murchison with such good-will, that in a few months I could read English prose without the assistance of a dictionary. My father, pleased to see this decided inclination on my part, was desirous of seconding it, and presented me with the complete works of Dickens and Thackeray, which he ordered direct from London. What I could read of them in my leisure moments interested me more than I can tell, and at the same time was excellent practice for me.

It happened on one of the Sundays of my captivity that I discovered in the library of the lycée the historical works of Hallam and Macaulay. There was a source of information to which it was not likely that my classmates, and especially Dutheil, would readily secure access. I at once placed the two great writers on the list of my select authorities, and I found them so rich in broad and novel views, I extracted from them such treasures of information, that my compositions immediately showed the effect, and secured me M. Aveline's commendation.

Much elated by this success, I redoubled my efforts, without saying anything of my discovery, and two or three times, one after the other, I had the satisfaction of taking first place from Dutheil. When at last the Easter holi-

days arrived, and with them the end of my imprisonment, those long sojourns in a room full of books, with boundless information at my disposal, had become to me such an agreeable habit, that what before was an intellectual luxury was now a necessity.

Each morning, therefore, after the breakfast at the family table where I sat once more in company with those dear to me, Baudouin and I would set out for the centre of Paris. He would betake himself to the Louvre, where he had obtained permission to sketch, and spend his day in reproducing on paper the finest of the antique marbles. As for me, I sped away to the Library Sainte-Geneviève, where I devoured the works of Sismondi, Augustin Thierry, Henri Martin, and Michelet. At four o'clock we met at the Luxembourg for a short, sharp game of football or a walk, and by six were home and ready for our dinner.

Those were holidays as were holidays! Baudouin and I would not have grumbled had they been protracted to the end of time. But life is not all vacation, more's the pity!

As M. Aveline had told me would be the case, I was now so well acquainted with the principal historical works that would be of service to me in the course of study for the year, that it was an easy matter for me to foretell, a week or two in advance, the volumes that I should stand in need of; when they were not on the shelves of the library of the lycée, or when I had not time to consult them during the brief daily period that the library was open, I had only to mention their titles to my father, who always took pleasure in procuring them for me.

I soon knew the delight of possessing a small library of my own, with all my favourite authors, in whose company I spent many a happy Sunday; this was the nucleus about which gathered the modest but, in my eyes, priceless col-

lection of books among which I still continue to spend so many pleasant hours.

And speaking of this, I often wonder how it is that, since the invention of printing, there still exist such multitudes of people who are continually saying, *I don't know what to do with myself!* as if there were not books in abundance to afford them pleasure, distraction, and useful instruction, all at the same time!

As for me, I aver that never in my life was I bored but once, and that was in a little lonely railway station on an abominably rainy day, when I had left my travelling bag with all my books behind me in the train from which I had just descended. As it was, I amused myself for an hour or two by reading the rules and regulations that were posted everywhere on the walls.

But to come back to the Lycée Montaigne. If the first semestre had brought me fewer honours than punishments, during the ensuing three months, I am happy to state, I became a model of scholastic virtue, having incurred disgrace but once. And even then I was innocent. Read and judge for yourselves!

Contrary to my usual habit, I had conscientiously done my duty by the *panada* which constituted our early meal, when Chavasse, one of my table companions, under the inspiration of some unfriendly demon, doubtless, took it in his head to exclaim :

“The devil take the *panada* ! Did one ever see such a rotten mess !”

The expression was overheard by an usher, who turned on us as if he had been stung by a viper.

“That is unparliamentary language, gentlemen,” he said, “and will entitle the speaker to a half-day’s confinement. I require a ‘responsible.’”



“MOLECULE BROUGHT OUT THE NUMBER 1132. IT WAS MINE!”

REESE LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA.

It was the custom at the Lycée Montaigne, for petty offences like the present, to select a "responsible," or one who should suffer vicariously for the rest ; this with the intention that all should be interested in the maintenance of order and discipline. By virtue of a tacit agreement between us it was also understood that the real offender was, under no circumstances, to reveal his identity. Lots were drawn to see who should be "responsible," and he took his punishment without a murmur. Experience had demonstrated that this method afforded a way of avoiding much equivocation and recrimination, while at the same time it facilitated the position of the expiatory victim with the faculty and the families themselves. How could one find it in his heart to be angry with a poor boy who said :

"Theoretically, I am innocent. Practically, we drew lots to see who should take the punishment, and it was I who 'won!'"

The usher had no more than pronounced his decree than Thomereau, with a zeal that appeared of doubtful taste, collected all the napkin-rings on the table, and, shaking them up in his cap, presented them to Molécule, his neighbour, for the decision of the lot.

Molécule brought out the number 1132. It was mine!

"Monsieur Besnard, you are confined to quarters until two o'clock," said the usher, inscribing my name in his memorandum book.

That was a disgrace for which I certainly had no cause to blush, and it has never troubled my conscience.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN DEEP WATER.

SUMMER is upon us once more. It is only a few weeks before the closing exercises and the examinations for admission to the great schools. You should see how we work nowadays in Division No. 1. We tug and strain at the collar, and everybody "crams."

Ségol will only talk in Latin verse. Dutheil is pale about the lips, and the only spot of red in his broad face is the eyes. It has been ascertained that he sleeps but half the night, and gets up surreptitiously to study by the light of the night lamp in the dormitory.

Molécule restricts himself to a sonnet or two a day.

Verschuren himself beholds with terror the approach of the moment when impartial judges will compare his merits with those of the other candidates for Saint-Cyr, and spends his recess going about among his comrades beseeching them to ask him "stumpers." In geography he shows remarkable strength in regard to "basins," and in "capitols of sous-préfectures" is without a rival.

Perhaps he owes this superiority to a peculiar geography that Thomereau has placed in circulation,—the French department subjected to the treatment that the Marquis de Mascarille would have inflicted on Roman history, and celebrated not only in verse but in puns and verbal quibbles.

“The Mans-Sarthe (*mansards*, garrets) have often sheltered poets—” That means that le Mans is the capital of the department of la Sarthe. There is a brilliant effort like this for each one of the departments.

Nor is this ingenious system of mnemotechnics confined to geography. Thomereau, who is not ambitious, and will be content so that he captures his sheepskin, no matter by what means, has invented similar contrivances that he applies to all sorts of subjects. For instance, instead of burdening his mind with the names of the twelve Roman emperors, he finds it more convenient to engrave on his memory the three cabalistic words,

Césautica, Claunégalo, Vivestido,

which signify Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian.

As for Baudouin, he continues to give the arts his preference. As soon as he has completed his tasks he sits down contentedly to copy photographs of antique statuary, engravings, or even anatomical charts.

Finally, as regards myself, Latin and French composition and history claim most of my attention. Every day there is a page of Bossuet, a page of Pascal, and a page of Cicero to be learned by heart, in addition to the diurnal lessons and exercises and my historical readings.

Time flies with astonishing rapidity. It seems as if we would never be able to “review” all the studies that we are expected to be perfect in at the great final trial. We grudge the hours that we are forced to lose on Sundays, and, without mentioning the matter to the comrades, carry away a volume or two under our tunics in order that we may “grub” at home.

The month of June is here. The heat is stifling. In the class-room, notwithstanding the open doors and windows, heads seem to fairly steam and smoke under the tension of the unceasing labour. It is the fashion to wear the hair cropped close, and we resemble a collection of Dutch cheeses.

“It looks more businesslike,” Dutheil assures us, “and tends to give the examiners a good opinion of you.”

It is also more convenient for the cold bath, and the cold bath is our weak spot. We love it to distraction.

Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, we rise at four in the morning. We hurry on our clothes, we follow the line of the quays, and ascend as far as the Bridge of Austerlitz, where a great bathing establishment, floored with wood, is reserved until seven o'clock for the exclusive use of the lycée. The distance is considerable, but the water is much cleaner than at the Pont-Neuf or the Pont-Royal, where the sewers of the great city disgorge their tribute.

Oh, the beneficent cool water! and how good it feels to dip one's head under the limpid stream! The *Girafe* is never empty; there is an endless chain of swimmers storming its defences on their way to the platform. Look out for your heads, and woe to the late comers! Scarcely has one diver cleft the wave, as Molécule says, who is nothing if not classic in his language, than another is on his heels. And how they shout and laugh! Why can't we have such a jolly time every morning?

“I have an idea,” Baudouin said to me one day. “You have noticed the skylight over the toilet-room at the bottom of the dormitory? Well, the first time you find the skylight open, hoist yourself up by your hands, use your eyes, and tell me what you see.”

I did as Baudouin directed, and beheld, immediately under me, the most magnificent bath-tub that one could dream of in all Paris! It was a public reservoir for supplying the quarter, a hundred metres long by forty or fifty wide, filled with cold, clear, translucent water, up to the level of the second story of the lycée. As our quarters were no higher than the third story, Baudouin's idea needed no further explanation. All devotees of the cold bath will understand to what acts of madness the passion may lead.

The very next night saw us at work.

Three o'clock had struck and the sky was already beginning to be tinted with the pearly hues of the coming dawn when, gliding noiselessly into the toilet-room, the door of which, opening on the dormitory, was always open, we raised ourselves to the roof through the glazed skylight. From there to make our way down to the broad walk, formed by the massive masonry that enclosed the basin and protected the adjoining buildings, was merely child's play for us; all we had to do was to hang by the gutter and let ourselves drop a distance of little more than two metres.

Our retreat, moreover, was assured by a feed pipe of ample dimensions in one corner, on which we counted to afford us a safe and convenient means of exit. There was a joint in the pipe which the plumber had most obligingly surrounded with a great ring of solder, thus forming a veritable ladder. There was nothing calculated to frighten us there, after our experience in the gymnasium.

On closer inspection, the reservoir resembled one of those great graving-docks that are met with in seaports. Around us nothing but high, white walls destitute of windows, the silence of the night and the cool breath

of the morning. A little inconstant breeze that blew across the surface of the slumbering water, ruffling it in spots, gave it the appearance of a lake.

In less time than it takes to tell it, we have thrown off the few garments that we had on; then, one, two, three! and we dive headlong!

Brrr!—how cold it is! That spring water, constantly renewed and brought to the spot in underground conduits, doubtless from a distance, for the consumption of the quarter, is at least ten degrees colder than the water of the Seine. But who cares! the pleasure is all the greater in this canicular heat.

The time passed so quickly that we were astounded on hearing the clock strike four. It was broad day by this time.

To return to the bank, shiveringly resume our linen garments, and return by the way we came, was the affair of a moment, and when the morning drum beat we were awakened from a salutary slumber. No one even suspected our expedition.

We were so well pleased with our experience that we failed not to repeat it on the ensuing nights, with various modifications and improvements. For instance, having noticed that our aquatic exercises gave us a ferocious appetite, and that we suffered greatly on account of our inability to appease it until the seven o'clock breakfast, we took the precaution during the day to lay aside a supply of bread. The little matutinal luncheon came in very acceptably, and afforded an additional zest to our natorial diversions.

After that our satisfaction was unalloyed, and we looked down, disdainfully, on the pigmy swimmers of the Pont d'Austerlitz in their wooden-bottomed bath. We

even came to neglect entirely what we now called that "cheap and nasty resort," the swimming-school, and to stick close by the lycée on Wednesday and Friday mornings, greatly to the surprise of our comrades.

For some three weeks we had thus been utilizing the drinking water of the indigenes of Chaillot for our own pleasure, and nothing had happened to mar our enjoyment, when one morning, right in the middle of our sport, Baudouin suddenly exclaimed :

"It's queer, but the bank of the reservoir looks to be higher than it was a little while ago!"

I looked in the direction he was looking. There could be no mistake about it: the level of the water had fallen considerably. When we went in there was an interval between its surface and the top of the retaining wall of not more than twenty-five or thirty centimetres. Now that interval was fully two metres.

The dimness of the early morning light could alone explain why we had failed to notice the phenomenon sooner, for the basin appeared now to be not more than half full, as when a dam is opened to draw off the water of a pond.

"Look alive!" I said to Baudouin, "or we sha'n't be able to get out."

We struck out vigorously for the bank.

Alas! already it was too late. The brink was beyond our reach, and the slimy, slippery walls of the reservoir, built of cut stone and without seam or crevice, afforded us no hold.

"There must be a ring somewhere, a grating, or iron-work of some description," Baudouin calmly said. "Let's swim easily and make the circuit of the enceinte; we can't fail to find something to hold on by."

We proceeded to swim slowly round the basin, like goldfish circumnavigating their little world behind its walls of glass.

There was no sign of a ring or grating, nor did the least support of any kind present itself to our prying glances. But on the other hand the level of the water continued to sink, though the movement was so slow as to be imperceptible. There was now a perpendicular surface, of a smoothness that was our despair, at least three metres high, between us and the brink. The basin was beginning to appear strangely narrow and confined.

“They are evidently emptying the reservoir,” I said to Baudouin, “and the longer we remain here the more difficulty we shall find in getting out.”

“That is perfectly clear. So clear that there is but one thing for us to do, — wait patiently for the water to flow in again,” he replied, with fine imperturbability.

“It does n't look as if there were much prospect of its doing so at present,” I rejoined, stretching myself on my back and floating.

“That is a good idea!” said Baudouin. “We may have some hours to wait, and it will be well for us to husband our strength.”

So we floated in a state of almost perfect quiescence, waiting for developments and turning our heads from time to time for a glance at the walls of our prison-house. They were rising higher and higher, like the hull of a stranded ship left bare by the receding tide, while the sun, rising over the roofs of the neighbouring houses, was already beginning to gild their crest. We heard the roll of the drum and the shuffling of multitudinous footsteps as the inmates of the lycée descended the staircase of the dormitories.

The clocks struck seven. We were less cheerful than we had been. The cold began to tell on us. Our limbs were numb and stiff. It was becoming more and more difficult to keep ourselves afloat.

“If we had only thought to bring our victuals with us,” said Baudouin with a reflective air, “instead of leaving them with our trousers!”

But that was a vain regret. To swim, to keep swimming, therein lay our only hope of safety. Our punishment was certainly fitted to our crime!

For a long time we had not spoken a word to each other. I know not what Baudouin’s reflections may have been, but for my part I was conscious of a growing sensation of weakness. It was not only that I had not strength to keep myself afloat, but I scarcely desired to have it.

The sun, pouring its rays on our bare heads, deranged my thoughts, blinded me, almost drove me frantic. I had a confused feeling that I was going to drown, and I told myself, with what little reflection I had remaining, that it was absurd to die in that way, without profit or glory, at the bottom of a cistern.

Would our corpses ever be recognized? Would the manner of our death ever become known?

Suddenly a joyful cry broke in upon the ringing in my ears:

“I have touched bottom! We are saved! The reservoir is nearly empty!”

It is Baudouin’s voice, and his call gives me strength to drag myself to the wall and support myself against it. It is as much as I can do. But for him I feel that I must have gone under and drowned in the four feet of water that remain. But he sustains me and speaks words of cheer to me.

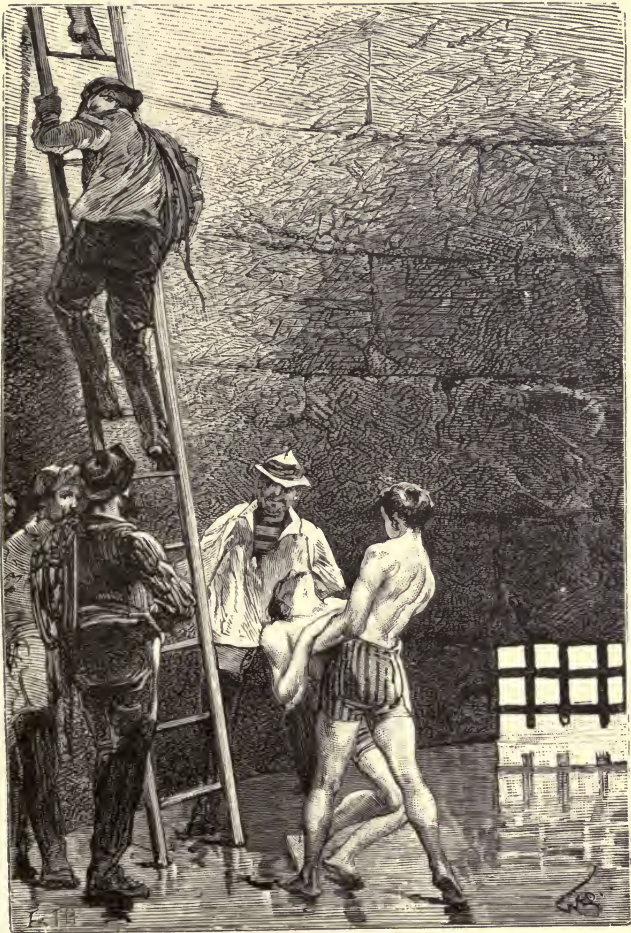
Fifteen minutes more and the water has all run off. We are standing dry-footed among the débris of every kind that chance or the winds of heaven have wafted thither : rags, old shoes, dead leaves, the nameless relics of the neighbouring civilization. We have fallen, measuring our length on the stone flooring, and roasting in the sunshine like crocodiles in the dry bed of an African torrent. Fatigue and hunger have proved too much for our resolution. We are seized with an unconquerable desire to sleep ; we resist, but ineffectually, and are on the point of yielding to that slumber which would be death under the lethal arrows of that fiery globe, when above us, fifteen metres over our heads, a clatter of wooden shoes is heard.

Ah, the sweet music ! It was an army of sweeps and scavengers, come to clear out the reservoir.

We are saved ! But at the cost of what terrible humiliation ! We felt that it would have been a distinct blessing could we have vanished into thin air when it became necessary to explain to the foreman of the gang the reason of our sorry state, endure the cruel laughter of the Auvergnats while awaiting the arrival of the ladder that was to rescue us from our plight, and, finally, reënter the lycée by the great door under the unsympathizing eye of the concierge.

The three days' confinement that worthily crowned our achievements was nothing compared with these earlier troubles. I have told what means I had at command to alleviate the horrors of that punishment. I have only a faint recollection of the four or five days of fever during which we alternately burned and froze on a cot in the hospital of the lycée, at a time when every hour was precious. Fever and punishment were alike well earned.

Where are you, fatigues, dangers, sorrows of those happy days ? Gone, never to return !



"IT WAS AN ARMY OF SWEEPS AND SCAVENGERS."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

EXAMINATIONS. — HOW KINDRED SPIRITS MEET.

THE time of supreme effort was come, the exercises of the general examination had begun. Notwithstanding the time I had lost, I had turned the last months of my year to such good account under M. Pellerin's guidance that I felt I had some reason to be hopeful. I had been five or six times first in French and Latin composition, history, and Greek translation, and second more frequently. With Dutheil and Ségol I was now considered one of Montaigne's champions.

We set out for the Sorbonne at six o'clock in the morning, shortly after we came down from the dormitory. There were sixteen of us in our little band, — five veterans, ten freshmen, and a "stop-gap," or alternate, — headed by an usher. Each one of us had breakfasted off a cutlet and a cup of coffee, and had in addition received a viaticum in the shape of a roll, a piece of sausage and a bottle of wine. These aliments were confided to the capacious recesses of the classic net.

The net! is it not the epitome of the whole examination for three-fourths of the contestants? What student would not think he was marching without weapons to the conflict unless he had first slung this poke across his shoulder, dictionary in one end, sausage in the other?

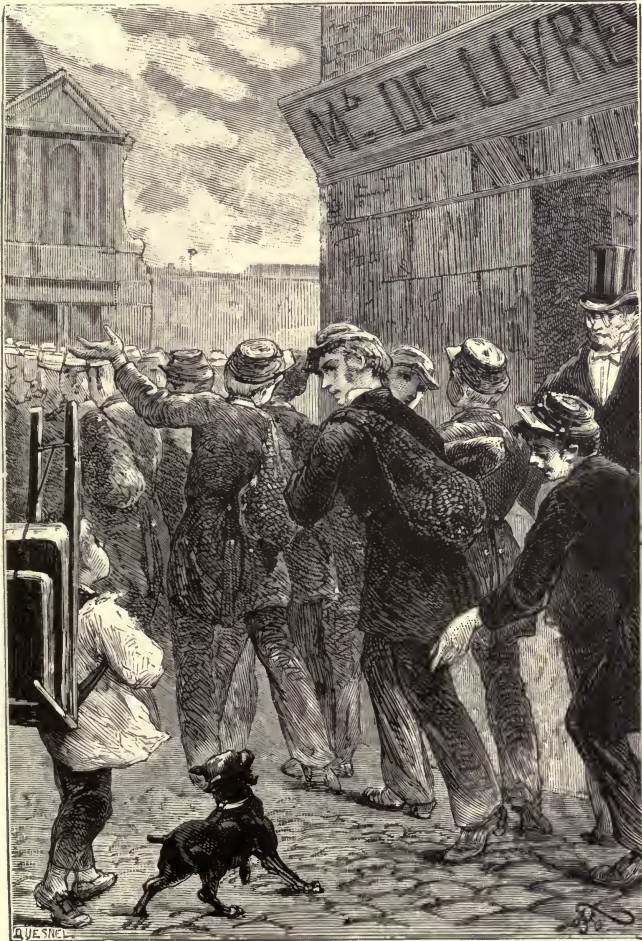
But it is not everything to possess a net; it must also be well garnished. As we passed through the Rue de

Buci, therefore, we failed not to supplement its contents with a cold chicken, a paté with crust of golden brown, and, perhaps, a supernumerary bottle. Those of a sybaritic turn added cherries and even pots of cream. In the Rue Saint-Jacques mention is still occasionally made of a young voluptuary who came in one morning with a cargo of bananas.

On that day the subject we were to be examined on was Latin composition. I had already competed for the prize in history and French composition, so that the spectacle no longer had the attraction of novelty for my eyes. But is not the twentieth review in which a soldier participates as interesting to him as the first? Little variety as the scene possessed, I contemplated it with unaltered curiosity.

It was nearly seven o'clock when we came out on the Place Gerson, in the midst of the contingents of the other lycées. There were the champions of Saint-Louis, of Descartes, of Stanislas, *en potache*, that is to say in uniform like us; the Sainte-Barbes in roundabouts, the Condorcets *en pékins*, the Charlemagnes in attire of various descriptions. Then come the Rollins, and the braves of Louis-le-Grand. Not a moment passed but some new detachment came marching up. Celebrities were recognized and pointed out as they passed, the honour men of the previous year, the probable victors of the present as designated by the rumour of the lycées. The noise and chatter, in the narrow place shut in on three sides by lofty buildings, was like the buzzing of a swarm of bees.

The black damp walls of the venerable Sorbonne, its back turned to the rising sun, in the bright crisp morning air resembled the façade of some necropolis. A necropolis



"WE CAME OUT ON THE PLACE GERSON."



of traditions and memories, at all events! On how many generations of schoolboys, pressing forward like us in close array, eager, impatient, ambitious, had not those old walls looked down, and how many more were they yet to behold ere they should crumble away in dust! Looking at them, with their grimy, weather-beaten face, the thought rose to one's mind that, could they talk, what tales they might tell of the scholars of bygone times, our predecessors of four centuries ago, concerning whom the grave M. Quicherat has given us such realistic details :

“ Save for the professor's chair, the classes had neither benches nor seats of any kind. The floor was strewn with straw in winter, with fresh-cut grass in the summer season. The scholars wallowed in this litter, ostensibly for reasons of humility. Their uniform, a long loose gown, belted to the form with a leather strap, served the twofold purpose of collecting and concealing filth. In the refectory during meals it was forbidden (the reader will pardon the crudity of this historical detail), it was forbidden to raise the hand to the cap, such was the fear inspired by the condition of the young men's heads ! ”

All those old memories came crowding back upon my mind during those few minutes of silent waiting. The strange faces of my comrades of a day gave me the impression of a race of shadows. Casting my eyes up to the antique clock set in the sombre façade, I experienced the same superstitious thrill that made my flesh creep in presence of the Egyptian and Assyrian colossi in the galleries of the Louvre. Even the great mouldering door before which we were drawn up, and whose twin leaves remained mysteriously closed, — as if it had been the mouth of a granite sphinx, — contributed to add to this effect and to inspire me with a secret awe.

It is seven o'clock at last. The two leaves of the door are thrown back with a clash and clatter of iron bars and creaking of rusty hinges. The great hall where the examinations are held appears before us, bare as a meeting-house, its white walls pierced with lofty windows.

At the end of the central aisle is the desk appropriated to the judges, all emeritus professors, all in stiff white cravats. On either side are pine tables, a score or so, arranged in parallel lines and furnished with inkstands, while drawn up around them a regiment of decrepit chairs provide seating accommodation. All these articles of furniture are discoloured by time and ink stains, and bear innumerable dates and names more or less artistically carved by students' jack-knives.

We enter with a rush. Each of us resumes his individuality and seats himself where he can find a place, regardless of all distinction of schools and lycées. The ushers, nothing loath to avail themselves of the half-holiday that the occasion gives them, vanish with celerity. The door on the Place Gerson is closed. And now there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth among the belated ones, if any such there be!

As I was turning the corner of the first unoccupied table that I met with, I came face to face with a young lad very plainly dressed in the civilian costume of one of those institutions which follow the curriculum of the lycées. We look at each other blankly, then an exclamation of astonishment bursts simultaneously from the lips of each:

"Besnard!"

"Mounerol!"

It was my old friend Criquet, of Châtillon, whom I encountered so unexpectedly on the field of battle. He had grown much taller in the last year, but had not parted

with the sun-browned complexion and those black almond-shaped eyes that gave him the appearance of a little Arab.

“What, yōu here? I did n’t so much as know you were in Paris.”

“I have been attending the Lauraguais school for the last eight months on a free scholarship.”

During the few seconds consumed in this rapid interchange of words the benches had all filled up. Criquet and I took our places at the last vacant table, within a step or two of the door.

“I am awfully glad to see you!” I said to him.

“So am I, too, you can just bet! But it won’t do to stand here talking, the dictation is about to begin.”

Dictionaries and writing materials had already been taken from the nets and spread upon the tables. An attendant, passing down the aisle, distributed to us blank forms of goodly proportions, having a wide margin and a printed heading. The latter read as follows :

UNIVERSITÉ DE FRANCE.

CONCOURS GÉNÉRAL.

CLASS IN

Mr. (*State name in full.*)
of the Lycée
born at , department of
the day of , 18—.

Beneath was a blank space over which the printed matter was to be turned down after the student had filled in the information desired, and a black line. This heading, detached by the gentlemen at the desk, and by them inscribed with a number corresponding with one which

they have previously placed on the margin of the blank form, is locked away in a box where, together with all the others, it is kept until the day when the judges officially report the results of the examination.

A professor, the dean of the faculty, rose to state the subject on which we were to write. There was a shuffling of feet and a tentative scratching of pens on paper, succeeded by a profound silence. Then the dean spoke in a clear, sonorous voice :

“*Horatii Flacci ad Tibullum epistola* — ” was what he said.

A low murmur rose, the contestants' various and probably conflicting opinions on the merits of the subject. Then the dictation went on : Tibullus, on his return from the Gallic war, was congratulated by Horace. The poet availed himself of his opportunity to recall the supposititious exploits of his friend in the suite of General Valerius Messala, and to give, in a few masterly strokes, a history of the campaign. Then, returning homeward, he glanced at Italy and the profound peace that had succeeded the civil dissensions. He drew a glowing picture of Roman civilization, an eulogy, however, whose fervour was somewhat chilled by satiric observations on the men and measures of the time. Coming back, presently, to Tibullus's personal affairs, he condoled with him for having, like Virgil, been plundered by rapacious legionaries of a portion of his wealth, but at the same time he commended him for having sought in the pursuits of literature enjoyments that no human power could take from him. Finally, he recommended him henceforth to eschew the fatigues of war, and, on his estate of Pedum, enjoy that golden mediocrity which is the true atmosphere of happiness.

When the reading came to an end, there was again

throughout the hall a breeze of emotion and diverse sentiments. But silence was restored almost immediately. Every one had applied himself to work.

For my part, I laid my arm flat upon the table and bowed my head upon it, and then bent all the powers of my imagination on the subject that had been assigned to us. I certainly was not like Petit-Jean in *les Plaideurs*, and I could not have said :

“ *Ce que je sais le mieux, c'est mon commencement !* ”

What kind of exordium should I select? An exordium *ex abrupto*, like Cicero's opening of his First against Catiline? It always takes, because with it one is certain to capture the attention of the reader. But was it in accord with the situation in the present case? Manifestly, no. Horace, in the calm repose of his study, takes his *stylus* to indite, for his friend's benefit, an academic dissertation on the questions of the day. In addition to the fact that he is naturally the mildest and most moderate of men, he has no motive for lashing himself into a fury. The exordium *ex abrupto* would appear to be more particularly adapted to the expression of anger, of indignation, real or simulated. We must, therefore, try something else here. An exordium *by insinuation*? That will not answer, either. Insinuatingness will do very well for an orator who is not sure of his audience, who desires to capture its good-will or simply its ear, to prepossess or to seduce it. But a poet, and such a poet! writing to a man of taste and learning like Tibullus, may be supposed to disdain such petty artifices. He knows that he will be read. The best course to pursue, therefore, is to begin in a perfectly simple and natural manner, setting forth the ideas in proper sequence as they rise to the mind.

That is one point settled. And now, what was the rôle that Tibullus probably played in that war with the Gauls? A Roman knight, a man of epicurean tastes, and the close friend of the commanding general, it is not likely that he had much experience of the real toils of the campaign; he, doubtless, made it as a spectator rather than as a soldier, and his name will not be found mentioned in the orders of the day. But Horace is too discreet and too well-bred to dwell on so delicate a point. He will, therefore, extend to Tibullus his twofold congratulations, on having borne a part in great events and on being able to relate them. At need, he will turn the shafts of his good-natured irony against himself, reminding his correspondent that his own military experience was not sufficiently glorious to justify him in criticising the deeds of others.

In this manner I was reviewing my subject in all its branches, endeavouring to saturate my mind with it and grouping in memory the various details with which I proposed to ornament it, when the clock of the Sorbonne, striking eight with loud, metallic clang, suddenly reminded me that I had not yet written a word. The scratching of pens flying over the paper on every side warned me that my comrades were already at their work. I seized mine, and, dipping it in the inkstand, proceeded to develop my theme.

The first lines came with difficulty. But, after a few minutes, I became master of the situation; I identified myself with my hero, and my task ceased to be laborious. Words came to me in serried battalions, my thoughts flowed in lucid order. I gave myself up heart and soul to my task.

For two hours I had been driving my pen continuously, and was just entering on the concluding paragraph of my

first rough draft, when a general movement throughout the room caused me to raise my head. The gentlemen at the desk had retired to an adjoining apartment, where breakfast was awaiting them, and a universal clatter of plates and bottles announced that the students were preparing to follow the good example set them by their superiors. There were some jaws, indeed, that had not even waited thus long to set to work.

My appetite awoke by a sort of gregarious instinct, and I remembered that I, too, had in my cupboard the wherewithal to effect an agreeable diversion to my mental labours. Now, or never, was the moment to tear Criquet from his labours. He had not once raised his nose from the paper ; he wrote, wrote, wrote, as if his life depended on it.

“ You don't intend to keep this up until three o'clock ; it will be too long for you to go,” I said to him, in an undertone. “ Come, rest awhile ; we'll make common stock of our provision, and have breakfast.”

Criquet looked at me, and laughed.

“ I warn you that it will be a losing operation for you,” he said. “ All I have is a crust of bread and a bit of cheese. *Dame !* they don't overfeed us at the Lauraguais school !”

“ Good !” I replied, “ you need not let that worry you. I have sausage sufficient for two, wine for four, and paté for six. Get ready your mandibles !”

I do not know that I ever enjoyed a breakfast more. The excitement of the contest, the pleasure of meeting an old comrade of Châtillon days, and one of those in whom I was most interested, the novelty of the improvised luncheon in a dark corner of the venerable edifice, all, even to the necessity of carrying on a fragmentary con-

versation in mysteriously low tones, contributed to make me find a special enjoyment in the little fête.

The hall, at that moment, presented a strange spectacle. The nets had all been emptied on the tables, and among their contents were patés enough to stock several shops. Some more luxurious ones — they were most likely from Condorcet — had travelling panniers equipped with a complete table-service, plates, knives, forks, drinking glass, and napkin. On the other hand, immature Diogenes were seen devouring suspicious-looking victuals that they took with their fingers from paper bags. One original, manifestly with an eye to effect, fried eggs on a tin plate over a fire of paper. Some were reading over and correcting their copy, while breakfasting. For the great majority, however, this Rabelaisian interlude was evidently the most important episode of the day. There were some who vented their excess of animal spirits in an irregular way, by bombarding with pellets of bread such faces as did not please them.

Criquet was, evidently, much more preoccupied with his Latin theme than with our breakfast, and, notwithstanding his efforts to respond to my attentions, appeared anxious to get back to his work. I soon saw that I should be indiscreet in keeping him longer from his task.

“We can talk more comfortably when it is all over, can't we?”

“That is so!” he said, with a sigh of relief. “I will go with you when we are dismissed, if you wish; I have permission to return alone.”

This speech enlightened me as to the present situation of my former friend and comrade. I knew that the privilege he spoke of, together with that of occupying a separate chamber, in private institutions is generally

granted only to pupils of conspicuous merit, and whose chances of success at the *concours* are considered exceptionally good.

“So, he retains at Paris the superiority that he acquired over us all at Châtillon?” I said to myself. Then, seeing that I was letting my laziness get the better of me: “But he is right, though,—he takes the only road to success, never to waste a minute!”

And I set to work again. This time I never raised my head until the very last second, when the attendant came round to collect the papers.

Mounerol was re-reading his, perhaps for the fiftieth time. He parted with it, regretfully, and only at the extreme limit of time, when the judges, after five or six final summonses, were making ready to retire.

“Well, are you satisfied?” I asked him at the threshold.

“Faith, no. I never had a subject that pleased me less. And you?”

“With me it is exactly the reverse. I liked the subject. But you are not to understand by that that I think my essay will gain the prize!”

According to promise, Criquet accompanied me to the door of the Lycée Montaigne. It was during the transit that I learned those particulars of his history that I was ignorant of.

He had been admitted to the Lauraguais school on a free scholarship, or, as he expressed it in his frank and picturesque language, as a *bête à concours*. In return for the gratuitous board and instruction that he received there, he was expected to enhance the reputation of the school by successes at the lycée and the Sorbonne. He had therefore worked with all his might during the entire year.

“It was our old principal at Châtillon, M. Ruette, who procured me that favour. I am very grateful to him for it, and to M. Lauraguais, too. But I can tell you, there are moments when the obligation weighs on me terribly. It seems to me that, unless I secure the prize, I shall have been stealing the bread that I have been eating. And who can count with any certainty on success at a general examination?”

“Bah! you must not entertain such ideas. When one has done his best he has nothing to reproach himself with. If you gain no prizes at the *concours*, you will have plenty at your lycée — By the way, how is your grandfather? do you ever hear from him?” I asked, desirous to change a subject that seemed painful to Mounerol.

“Regularly, every month. He is very well and perfectly happy since he was enabled to open a little shop on the Cours. I am trying awfully hard to fit myself for a teacher, so I can have him with me.”

“Ah! then that is settled. You are going to be a teacher?”

“I don’t see anything better that I can do. But that is also the opinion of M. Ruette and those who take an interest in me.”

While the brave fellow was telling me of his projects for the future, I involuntarily recalled the image of little Criquet, as he had appeared to Baudouin and me on the occasion of our first discovering him in the garret, surrounded by three hundred pairs of shoes that he had to clean.

In the midst of my reflections we came to the Rue de Chaillot.

“Will you come and dine with us on Sunday?” I asked Mounerol as we were about to part. “I can’t

tell you how pleased I and all my family will be to have you."

I gave him our address at Billancourt. He promised to be punctual, and only left me at the door of the lycée.

Baudouin was impatiently awaiting my arrival.

"Well, how about that Latin composition?" he shouted, as soon as he saw me enter the courtyard. "Are you satisfied with yourself?"

By way of answer I gave him my rough draft, which varied little from the corrected copy except toward the end. He read it attentively, then came nearer to me.

"My little man, you have the prize of honour," he said to me, in perfect seriousness. "Nobody, I don't care who he is, can have written four pages of Latin superior to that."

M. Pellerin, who came along presently, looking for news, was also of opinion that my paper was good and that there might be a chance for me. That was much the way I looked at the matter myself, to be quite frank, and what confirmed me in my opinion was that Dutheil, by universal consent, had never done so poorly.

"After all, why should n't I have it, that prize of honour?" I said to myself.

I dropped off to sleep sinking in imagination under my load of crowns. And appended to my paper was this note, which did not figure on my rough draft — a performance of utmost excellence!

CHAPTER XIX.

CONTAINING MANY SURPRISES.

“GENTLEMEN,” Dutheil said to us one day late in July, “it is absolutely impossible to get another sou into our bank. It is gorged with riches, *abundat divitiis*, as Lhomond says. What shall we do—start a fresh one?”

“No! No!” the whole class cried in chorus. “Smash the jug, and close the account!”

It may be as well to explain that the “jug” in question was the receptacle of the *cagnotte*, a great earthenware child’s saving’s-bank, in which the product of our fines, transformed into pieces of one, two, and even five francs, was deposited nightly by the methodical Dutheil.

There was also a cash-book, kept by Payan, in which all payments to the fund were regularly inscribed and which might serve to verify the account, if it should ever be considered necessary. No one had the remotest idea of the total we might have reached. Certain persons had of late evinced a disposition to proceed to the autopsy of the jug, but it had always met with violent opposition, and, the advice of the moderate party prevailing, the operation had been deferred. For the first time the class was now unanimous on the affirmative side of the question.

“I demand that, before the safe is opened, Payan give

us the footing of his account," said Dutheil. "If his total and my money agree, there will be no room for suspicion."

This desire was too reasonable not to be complied with at once. A long silence ensued, which was finally broken by Payan, exclaiming :

"Six hundred and twenty-eight francs, forty centimes."

It was incredible ; the amount exceeded by at least a third the most daring estimates. Think of the misdemeanours represented by that sum, realized in less than ten months in a class of between twenty and thirty pupils !

"We will now proceed to verify those figures," said Dutheil, more agitated than he cared to let it appear.

To him, too, the amount seemed heavy. If there should be a shortage — if there should not be that much money in the *cagnotte* !

We drew lots to see who should strike the blow that was to end the existence of the jug, which was placed on the floor exactly in the middle of the class-room on a great sheet of drawing-paper. Fortune smiled on Verscharen, who smote, with a mighty blow, the plethoric abdomen of the receptacle. It flew in fragments, and a torrent of silver coins overflowed upon the ground. These had to be examined, assorted, arranged in piles, and counted. The work occupied two tellers for a full half hour.

At length the task was finished. An imposing array of two and five franc pieces, carefully assorted, gave the preposterous total of *six hundred and forty-three francs, fifty centimes*, — fifteen francs and ten centimes more than Payan's cash-book called for.

Dutheil was radiant and Payan dumfounded.

“That’s what comes of studying the higher mathematics,” observed Thomereau; “one becomes incapable of adding up a column of figures!”

“Gentlemen,” Payan declared, “there is something abnormal here, and it must be looked into. It must be that some anonymous philanthropist has been paying in fines that he never incurred! It is contrary to all precedent. We might reasonably have expected that at least ten per cent. of the contents of the jug would have been found to consist of trouser buttons and Swiss silver; for the *cagnotte* to pay more than it received is simply miraculous.”

“*Parbleu!*” exclaimed Baudouin, “Dutheil chipped in a little something from time to time, fearing he might be short.”

“Let’s drop this useless inquiry,” said Dutheil, blushing violently, which would seem to indicate that Baudouin had guessed aright, “and proceed to business. What shall we do with all this money?”

“First of all, exchange it for currency of a less Lacedæmonian character,” Verscharen suggested.

Agreed to unanimously.

“It might be distributed through the medium of a lottery,” hazarded Ségol.

Rejected indignantly.

“How would it do to spend it for fireworks to be let off in the street on the day of the distribution of prizes?”

Moderate enthusiasm.

“Build a great launch to hold thirty-one and take the wind out of the sails of all the boat clubs of the Seine and Marne?”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“A great idea!”

“It is idiotic!”

“Down with the launch!”

“Hurrah for the launch!”

“What do you say to dividing the fund among ourselves?”

“Order, order!—it is contrary to the spirit of the institution.”

“Institute a prize of virtue for the usher who inflicts the fewest punishments!”

“Virtue is its own reward.”

Here poor Chavasse succeeded at last in getting in a word. “Gentlemen,” he said, “it seems to me that it has already been decided how the *cagnotte* is to be employed. It was agreed that it should be spent for a good dinner!”

This reminder of plighted faith was uttered in so lugubrious a tone that our hearts were touched.

“Chavasse is right!—Chavasse is the boy!—We’ll have a dinner that will astonish the natives!”

“Spend six hundred and forty francs on a dinner for thirty-one persons! Why, it would be abominable,” said Baudouin, when the excitement had partially subsided.

“Bah! that is only twenty francs a head and forty francs for the waiters,” Chavasse retorted, who had all his figures at his fingers’ ends. “That is not excessive, if we dine at a first-class restaurant,—and it would be absurd to do otherwise.”

“We can get just as good a spread at half the price by going to a less pretentious establishment,” said Dutheil, “and when it is over there will be a snug little sum left that we can apply to some charitable purpose.”

This sensible and praiseworthy proposal was well received.

“That is right,” Baudouin corroborated. “For ten francs a head and by going a little way out of town, we can get as good a dinner as any one could wish for, retaining the whole restaurant into the bargain, and have just as good a time as we would have in the most gorgeous salon on the boulevard.”

This was the determination that was finally arrived at, in spite of Chavasse’s mournful protests. He declared that the arrangement was a deplorable travesty of his conception; that we should have a miserable, insufficient, ill-cooked dinner, instead of the ambrosial banquet of his dreams; as well go to the steward and obtain permission to dine in the refectory of the lycée, and so forth.

But his gloomy prognostics were unheeded; it was as much as ever that two or three chronic grumblers like Ségol, who had made themselves obnoxious by the pains they had taken throughout the year to make their contributions to the *cagnotte* as small as possible, supported him in his reclamations. By way of consoling our titular Brillat-Savarin he was assigned the duty, in concert with Dutheil and Payan, our two commissaries, of framing the menu of the banquet.

They were also commissioned to make inquiry among our masters as to the worthiest use to make of one-half of our treasure. I can’t tell the satisfaction that we all derived from the thought that to our enjoyment was to be joined the succour of some afflicted one. It served as a sort of offset to the secret repugnance that some of us felt toward the idea of mere vulgar gormandizing.

From this time, the banquet became so constant a topic of conversation in the playground that it gradually as-

sumed the proportions of a veritable event. The commissaries were close-mouthed regarding details, but had evidently determined to surpass themselves.

It leaked out presently that they had made selection of a celebrated restaurant at Saint-Germain. The proprietor had promised to outdo all that his competitors could promise. Chavasse's spirits rose perceptibly, and he pledged himself to astonish us with the menu. It transpired that one of the principal dishes, or *pièces de résistance*, was to be roast Rouen ducks. In the absence of further information, we dwelt so fondly on this detail, that soon the banquet came to be designated the *duck dinner*.

Molécule, of course, did not fail to take advantage of this intelligence, and I was given to understand, under a pledge of inviolable secrecy, that he was composing an ode for the occasion, in honour of the ducks of Rouen. A circumstance that distressed him greatly, was that he was uncertain how to frame his rhymes, not knowing whether the birds were to be served with olives or turnips. I added to his perplexity by reminding him that there was a third alternative, and that it was not unusual to serve ducks with green peas.

In the meantime the days were gliding by, and on the first Saturday in August, about five o'clock in the afternoon, these culinary preoccupations gave way to others of a more classic nature.

We were momentarily awaiting the results of the general examinations, which the vice-rector of the Académie de Paris, assisted by all the principals, was in process of ascertaining in one of the chambers of the Sorbonne.

It is there that, after having been read and classified by committees of eminent experts—masters of conferences at the Normal School, professors of the faculties,

or of the Collège de France — the successful exercises are brought to be identified by means of the numbered headings that have been carefully preserved in the sealed boxes of which we told in a previous chapter.

The ceremony styled the *opening of the boxes* takes place behind closed doors ; nevertheless, it never fails to attract to the courtyard of the Sorbonne all the professors interested in the proceedings, together with a goodly number of outsiders, drawn there either by the hope of picking up some bit of information, or simply by that instinct of curiosity which induces crowds to gather at the foot of a wall behind which they have reason to think something is going on.

It is seldom that these impatient ones are the wiser for their zeal, but, on the other hand, false reports abound, and not a quarter of an hour passes but a rumour, starting from no one knows where, circulates through the throng with telegraphic speed.

“Charlemagne has the first prize in mathematics !”

“No, Condorcet has it !”

“A scrub-woman listening at the keyhole heard it was Montaigne !”

And so it goes on for the space of two or three hours.

At last the principals are seen emerging from the doorway. Occasionally one of them will kindly stop, and give an honour man whom he perceives among the crowd the happy tidings that concern him so deeply. For the most part, however, they are mute as destiny, reserving the longed-for information for their own lycée.

It is easy to imagine the feverish state in which those of us who were considered to *have chances* spent the last moments that lay between them and that solemn hour.

As for me, I had suddenly given way to a sensation of profound discouragement, and no longer dared hope even for an accessit. Viewed at a distance, the contest appeared to me in the light of a gigantic lottery, where, for one chance of winning, one stands a million chances to lose.

At last the drum began to beat.

In a few moments all the divisions were formed in a hollow square in the court of reviews. Surrounding us, outside the square, were two or three hundred day scholars, who had lingered after the dismissal of the afternoon class in order to hear the bulletins read. The principal, the proctor, and most of the professors, among whom I noticed MM. Pellerin and Aveline, both evidently well pleased, came and took their places in the centre of the square.

“Gentlemen,” said M. Montus, in the midst of a profound silence, “the lycée has no reason to be otherwise than proud of the results of the present year. *Two* prizes of honour, *seven* first prizes, *eleven* second prizes, and *seventeen* accessits, — that is the share allotted to us.”

Here the speaker unfolded a paper that he held in his hand. My heart beat as if it would burst my bosom, and I breathed with difficulty.

“The prizes of honour,” he continued, “went, one to the class in higher mathematics, and the other to the class in history —”

The effect these words produced on me was that of a shower-bath in wintry weather. Farewell, my coveted prize in Latin composition, forever farewell!

“The prize of honour in mathematics was awarded to M. Payan,” the principal went on.

The name had no more than passed his lips than our chief's voice was drowned in a salvo of applause, but a general cry of *hush!* restored order in a trice.

“— and M. Besnard carried off the great prize in history.”

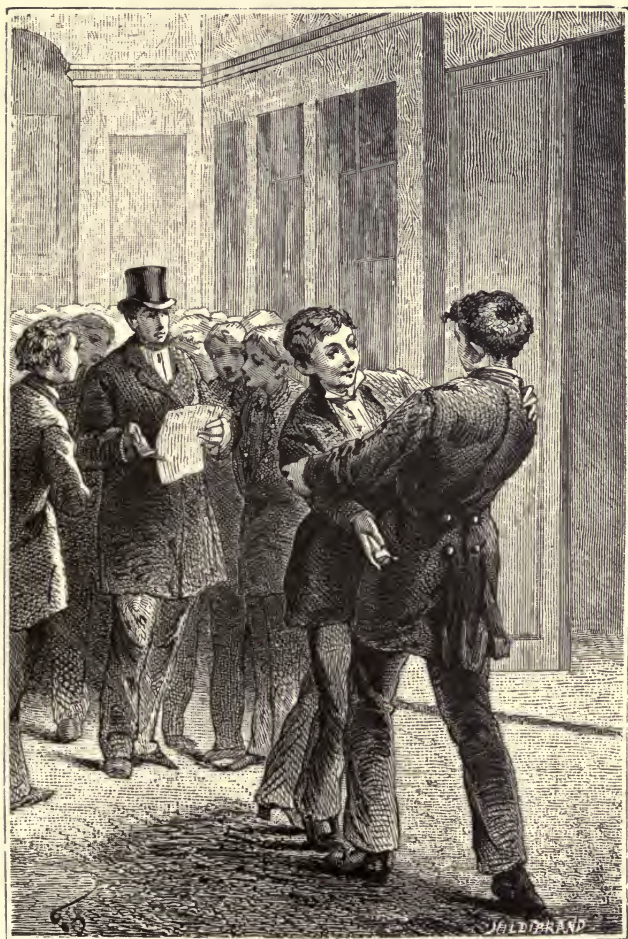
I could scarcely believe my ears, while, in the midst of another round of applause, Baudouin, more delighted than I, if such a thing were possible, took me in his arms and hugged me as if his intention were to strangle me.

“In Latin composition,” the principal resumed, “we were less fortunate; M. Dutheil took a first accessit; but it was a pupil of Charlemagne, M. Mounerol, who gained the prize of honour in rhetoric, and a pupil of Saint-Louis, M. Julineau, that in philosophy. The second prize in French composition is ours, and it was M. Dutheil who saved it for us; a third accessit goes to M. Besnard, and we have also the first prize in Latin versification, which was captured by M. Ségol. In Greek translation, M. Besnard has a second accessit, and M. Dutheil a fourth. M. Baudouin has a second accessit in Latin translation —”

And thus the reading of the list went on. When it was completed, each division, accompanied by fresh applause, returned to its court, and there was dispensation from all duties until supper-time.

I was beside myself with joy, and when M. Pellerin, accompanied by M. Aveline, came to congratulate me, I begged him to telegraph the glorious news to my parents.

“What strange luck!” I said to Baudouin, when our comrades had finally desisted from their hand-shaking; “I have the prize in history that I should have never thought of counting on, and not so much as an accessit in



“BAUDOUIN TOOK ME IN HIS ARMS AND HUGGED ME.”

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CALIFORNIA.

Latin composition, your flattering prognostics notwithstanding —”

“Well, the *accessit* in Latin translation, awarded to me, a sculptor; don't you think that is more inexplicable than your history prize? I came to the examination by the merest chance, as a substitute, and I capture an *accessit*! I should hardly have been more surprised if I had taken the prize of honour!”

“Ah, the prize of honour! I am glad that it went to Mounerol! Poor Criquet! It will make his grandfather very happy!”

“Happy!” Baudouin exclaimed, “yes, if he had any idea of what a prize of honour means. But how could he have, good man, in his garret in far-away Châtillon? He should see his grandson in his glory, and that is impossible, for he lacks everything, from the price of a railway ticket to a decent coat. And to think that to-morrow we are going to spend more money in bestial gormandizing than would suffice to give him that pleasure!”

“That is a glorious idea,” I cried. “Why should n't we propose to our comrades to apply a portion of what is left in the *cagnotte* to such a worthy purpose? It is not definitely settled yet what is to be done with it.”

No sooner said than done. By dint of much shouting and beckoning we bring the remainder of the division to us and explain our idea. Mounerol, the recipient of the prize of honour, is a lad of our province, educated as a charity pupil at the lycée of Châtillon, and at the Lauraguais school. Of all his family all that remains to him is an old grandfather, a poor man, sinking under the weight of years and infirmities, who is struggling on in direst poverty. Would it not be a humane action to remit at once to this good old man, a sum sufficient to enable him

to come and witness the distribution of the prizes, and see his grandson crowned? Let each of us put himself in Mounerol's place and reflect how disheartening it would be in such a case to have not a single relative in the hall to behold his triumph. Could we make a better use of our surplus fund, or better affirm the solidarity that should prevail among all the lycées?

We were not allowed to finish. The entire division, enthusiastically adopting Baudouin's generous idea, voted the remittance to Père Plaisir of a sum of three hundred francs, in order that he might be present two days later at the ceremonies in the Sorbonne.

Dutheil and I were commissioned to make the necessary arrangements, and, as may be supposed, we did not let the grass grow under our feet. Thanks to Anselme's friendly coöperation, our letter for Châtillon went out by that night's mail.

CHAPTER XX.

OLYMPIC GAMES REVIVED. — THE DUCK DINNER.

SIX o'clock was the hour appointed for our assemblage at the Pavilion, but our impatience had so run ahead of the time that it was barely four when Baudouin and I reached Saint-Germain.

As it was, we regretted that we had not made an even earlier start, for, as we emerged from the railway station, we saw the tail-end of a long procession disappearing up an adjacent street. At the same time the sound of military music in the distance reached our ears.

A good-natured citizen obligingly informed us that a great review of firemen had just taken place.

"And a fine display it was," he added, with unaffected enthusiasm. "There were three thousand men in line! Just think once, the firemen of fifteen or twenty departments, all drawn up on the terrace! It was for the great decennial prize, you know."

Regretting to have missed the spectacle, but nevertheless determined not to give way to melancholy, we betook ourselves to the great shaded alleys which make the edge of the forest a veritable park.

The crowd was still considerable, especially in the quarter where a hundred or so open-air booths had been hastily run up for the festive occasion. There were two long rows of little shops, Italian cafés, merry-go-rounds,

theatres of marionettes, dioramas, tents of jugglers and mountebanks, who announced their attractions in squeaking voices to the accompaniment of discordant music.

Up and down the space between these traps to catch the pennies of the multitude streamed a ceaseless tide of Parisians in their Sunday best, and gawky countryfolks, bands of children, and soldiers off duty. The whole scene was bathed in the brilliant sunshine of August, clouds of stifling dust, and that damp, low-hanging steam that rises from a crowd on a hot summer's day.

We had not been in this paradise of popular delight five minutes when we caught sight of Verschuren and Thomereau. Like us, they were killing time while awaiting the hour of dinner.

"Did you miss the review?" cried Verschuren, as soon as he saw us. "Guess who commanded the handsomest company! It's no use, though; you may as well give it up. I'll tell you: Captain Biradent, of Châtillon! And my stars, how the people applauded when they saw his helmet of honour! Tell Thomereau the story, Besnard; he will think I am romancing if I state that that helmet was the reward for saving your humble servant's life."

At Verschuren's request, I explained to Thomereau how Captain Biradent had, in truth, saved all the inmates of our dormitory from a terrible fire that broke out in it.

"But it should be said that Verschuren had not yet shown any sign of the martial instincts that distinguish him to-day, and had no inclination to face fire," Baudouin added, with a laugh.

Verschuren did not hesitate to admit that he had had a good scare that night, and the four of us resumed our walk. The influence of the jollity that we saw on every side, joined to our own private resolve not to be victims of dull

care, was already producing an appreciable effect on us. We were affected by a sort of contagious exaltation of the spirits. We went hither and yon, this way and that, yielding to an almost irresistible desire for movement and noise. We stopped in one place to pull the string of a Dutch top, in another to have a ride on the wooden horses, as if we had been ten-year-old boys. We laughed boisterously for no cause, and were possessed by an increasing desire to yell and "raise Cain" generally.

One cannot be too careful to guard against such impulses when he feels them germinating in him. We gave them no heed, however, and it was with the most complete insouciance that we stopped before the entrance of a sort of itinerant circus, housed in a miserable old tent of striped cotton canvas supported from space to space by great stakes planted in the ground.

The entrance was surmounted by a scaffold, behind which depended a great canvas screen on which were depicted figures of wrestlers in classic costume. An exhibition had apparently ended not long previously, for grouped about the enclosure some spectators, not very numerous, however, were still discussing the merits of the show.

"I tell you that he did n't touch both shoulders."

"Good! I say he did, for I saw the sawdust on his shoulder-blades."

"Oh, for my part, don't you see, I take no stock in those *amateurs*; they are nothing but confederates who play into one another's hand."

Our curiosity was whetted by these conversational fragments, and we advanced to a position where we could read a great poster that was suspended from one of the door-posts:

ARENA OF SAINT-CLOUD.

GRECO-ROMAN WRESTLING.

*Revival of the Pyrrhic, Athletic, and Gymnastic
Sports of the Greeks and Romans,
under the Direction of M. Monin-Javot,
ex-champion of South America.
Open from 12 M. until 10 at Night.*

ADMISSION, 10 CENTIMES.

We arrived in the nick of time. The proprietor of the show was reciting in hoarse tones his monotonous and oft-repeated chant :

“Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I, Monin-Javot, here present and now addressing you, offer a reward of five hundred thousand francs to any man who shall down me ! (*Movement of stupefaction in the audience.*) F-i-v-e hundred thousand frrrancs ! in bills of the Bank of France, — in gold, — or in drafts at sight on M. le Baron de Rothschild ! And happy shall I be, I assure you, to pay that sacred debt, for I shall have learned that the blood of old Gaul has not deteriorated. (*M. Monin-Javot wipes away a tear, and smites the painted curtain behind him with his sword of lath.*)

“Ladies and gentlemen, who is there among you that is not tempted to hazard the attempt ? You say to yourselves, Five hundred thousand francs are a very pretty sum ; I am going to try to earn them ; if I meet with a fall it will be no disgrace, coming from Monin-Javot ; if I am victorious my fortune is made. You wish to make the attempt, then, and the ambition does honour to your intelligence even more than to your courage. It is well, gentlemen ; enter, inscribe your names on the lists ; the books are always open ! But permit me to inform you

that, owing to the immense number of candidates, you will be expected first to pass a preliminary test. (*Movement of attention in the audience.*)

“I have about me, as you are aware, a phalanx of invincible wrestlers whose fame cannot have failed to reach your ears. Not one of these athletes — and I say it without fear of wounding their generous self-esteem — has ever succeeded in vanquishing me. Not one of them approaches my force and skill. It will be admitted, therefore, that any contestant who is thrown by one of them is unworthy to measure his prowess against mine.

“What remains for you to do, then, you who aspire to win the prize of five hundred thousand francs? Simply to present yourselves in the arena and down successively all my pupils! When by doing that you shall have proved that I can contend with you without wasting my own and the public’s time, the hour for the decisive contest will have struck, and you will always find me ready! (*Loud applause.*)

“But in the meantime, ladies and gentlemen, I do not wish that you should think I am imposing on you a fruitless task. No indeed! Never shall it be said that an amateur vanquished one of our athletes without deriving a substantial advantage from his victory. For instance, it is now time for Pollux, known as the Florentine Bronze, and the Eel of the Charente-Inférieure, to appear in the lists. Well! whoever shall apply for leave to pit himself against either of those champions shall be accorded the honour! And whoever succeeds in throwing his adversary shall be entitled to receive the sum of twenty-five francs, in current coin of the realm, with discount or deduction of any kind! (*Emphasizes his speech by repeated blows on the curtain with his sword of lath.*)

“And to participate in these inestimable advantages and witness these heroic contests, what, ladies and gentlemen, is the admission fee that we ask from your generosity? Almost nothing, scarcely enough to cover our expense for rent, an obolus, a wretched trifle! It is not ten francs, as at Opera; it is not six francs, as at the Comédie Française; it is not one franc; it is not even ten sous!—but only the miserable pittance of ten centimes, two sous! Two sous to see the Florentine Bronze in conflict with the Eel of the Charente-Inférieure! Two sous to see the amateurs enter the lists! Two sous to witness our splendid revival of the old Grecian and Roman games! Two sous to win five and twenty francs! Two sous to earn five hundred thousand francs! Think of it! Walk in, ladies and gentlemen! Band, strike up!”

In obedience to the command, a drum and trombone, stationed on the scaffold, broke out in a horrible andante. At the same time the two flaps of coarse canvas that closed the entrance of the tent were drawn aside, and about thirty men and boys, seduced by M. Monin-Javot's flowery eloquence, pushed their way in. As we still had an hour and more on our hands before the time set for the dinner, we followed their example.

The arena was certainly not pretentious: it consisted of a circular space in the tent, railed off by a primitive arrangement of stakes and ropes. This enclosure was strewn with a thick layer of sawdust. Outside the ropes was a sort of gangway reserved for the spectators, who had at their backs the canvas walls of the structure.

After the band had played for a quarter of an hour the spectators, notwithstanding M. Monin-Javot's reiterated and stirring appeals, did not number more than forty, including our party.

The drum and trombone at last desisted from their cacophony, and after a wait of about ten minutes the two contestants, equipped in the traditional costume of pink fleshings and spangled velvet trunks, presented themselves in the arena. It was they, it was the Eel of the Charente-Inférieure and the Florentine Bronze!

It would seem that they had other names as well, for they had no more than shown their faces than a fat man, in a buff nankin waistcoat, who was standing near us, exclaimed:

“Ah, upon my word, that is giving it to us a little too strong!”

“He means the coffee, I suppose,” observed Thomereau.

“What’s that you say, sir?”

“Never mind.”

“Well, I say again, it is cutting it too thick. Those are the very same men who were introduced to us a little while ago as Aubry the Lion and Jacques the invincible wrestler! I recognize them perfectly; the little chap has not even changed his costume. As for the other, he has taken the pains to blacken his face and hands with soot, and that’s all.”

At this juncture M. Monin-Javot announced that the performance was about to begin. He had at last regretfully decided to close the flaps that served as a doorway, and was now patrolling the outer circumference of the ring, aiming a blow, whenever he had a chance, at the heads of the small boys who had crept under the canvas in the hope of seeing without paying.

“Pollux and the Eel will now contend together,” he proclaimed, “and if, after the courteous contest, one of the spectators should feel disposed to try conclusions with the victor, the ring will be open to him.”

The two athletes began by exchanging the customary salutes and hand-shakes. An engaging smile that never left their lips was meant to show the loyalty and good faith with which they entered on the conflict. They stooped simultaneously, gathered a handful of dust with which they rubbed the palms of their hands, and faced each other in the most sculpturesque attitude they could think of. At last they clinched, seizing each other around the body, and began to wrestle.

It seemed to us, whether we were right or not, that they were favouring each other, and infused only a very moderate degree of spirit into their "work." Baudouin, who was deeply interested in the scene, was indignant at such faint-heartedness.

"More steam!" he said in an undertone, when the adversaries approached us in the course of their evolutions. "Get down to work, now! One would suppose you were afraid of damaging your beauty."

The Eel and the Florentine Bronze kept on seizing each other by the arms, the neck, the waist, swaying, struggling, stooping, rising, going through all the motions of a genuine conflict, but without serious results. Two or three times they rolled over and over together on the ground, but nothing came of it. They rose quickly and resumed their hold.

Finally, after five or six bouts, the Eel was suddenly lifted bodily from off the ground by his opponent, who laid him flat on his back and by a supreme effort pressed both his shoulders down into the sawdust.

Pollux was the victor. He gallantly tendered his hand to the vanquished, and bowed to the spectators.

There was applause from some quarters. But Baudouin was not satisfied.

“It is nothing but a farce!” he injudiciously exclaimed, in quite a loud voice. “The Eel could have saved himself if he had tried. The fellows are accomplices.”

M. Monin-Javot, who chanced just then to be standing a few steps from us, divined rather than heard these words. At any rate he saw his opportunity.

“Perhaps *mossieu* would like to try his strength against Pollux?” he said, approaching us, with a tantalizing air. “He would then be assured that the contest is conducted honestly, and that we have nothing to fear from any rivals.”

Baudouin’s face became very red, but he spoke no word. It was clear that he was not particularly averse to accepting the challenge, but repugnance to making a spectacle of himself restrained him.

M. Monin-Javot surveyed him with an ironic eye.

“*Mossieu* is probably afraid of getting a fall?” he continued. “That is precisely what would happen in all likelihood, and I see by the look of Pollux’s eye that he would not hesitate to tackle two or three adversaries like *mossieu*.”

Baudouin’s face was getting redder and redder. As for us, we were beginning to think that the honour of the lycée was in a ticklish position. Students in rhetoric are not old men, you know.

“Why should n’t you try it?” I said to Baudouin; “you are stronger than that Aztec!”

I had committed an imprudence. Baudouin looked at me with the air of one who only wants a backer to engage in any folly.

Monin-Javot looked at me also. He had overheard.

“That remains to be seen, young man,” said the tempter.

“ Shall I have to put on tights ? ” Baudouin suddenly asked.

“ No, *mossieu*. You may come on in your trousers, and you may even keep on your socks if you feel inclined.”

This inducement appeared to settle the question with Baudouin. With a rapid movement he threw aside his *képi*, removed his tunic, stripped off his shirt, kicked off his shoes, and jumped into the ring, naked to the belt.

He was greeted with a round of applause.

“ Good ! another confederate ! ” said our neighbour, the man in the nankin waistcoat.

“ A confederate ! ” I hotly rejoined. “ Do you mean to say that Baudouin is a confederate ! ”

The man’s observation had sufficed to show me the injudiciousness of Baudouin’s action, and I began to repent of the encouragement that I had afforded him. A glance at our champion would have quickly obliterated this impression, however. He made a handsome picture, did our champion, with his small Roman head poised on a columnar neck, his nostrils dilated and eyes flashing with the joy of conflict, his well-developed chest and sinewy arms ! No one would have supposed he was a boy scarce eighteen years old ; such were the elegant proportions of his person that every one took him for a man of twenty-two or twenty-three.

Pollux’s looks seemed to say, —

‘ What is this ? ’

“ *Ce bloc enfariné ne me dit rien qui vaille !* ”

The usual preliminary salaams were exchanged. Baudouin, a past master in all pertaining to gymnastics, performed them as if he had been practising them all his life. At last they took their positions.

The two combatants seized each other round the body. I could not help shuddering as I saw the Florentine Bronze's long black arms twine themselves like serpents about Baudouin's waist. But he showed no sign of flinching. He made no demonstration, but balanced himself lightly for a moment as if to give his adversary an opportunity to perfect his hold, then quickly bending to the left and raising his arms, he twisted the negro's head round under his right armpit and held it there as in a vice. Pollux turned and writhed in a desperate effort to release himself. All was in vain. Baudouin turned as he turned, showing successfully to the circle of spectators the black face grinning and grimacing behind his back.

The black then adopted the expedient of loosing his hold and falling. Baudouin, without relaxing his grasp, accompanied him to the arena.

They rolled over and over on the ground, neither able to secure the mastery, and after a dozen ineffectual attempts rose to their feet. Every one applauded. There was a pause lasting from two to three minutes.

It was again Pollux who took the initiative in the second round. He attempted to take Baudouin by the shoulders and force him down by main strength, then to grasp him beneath the arms and swing him on his hip, then by a feint to seize him by the waist and send him to the earth head foremost. Each time his opponent clung to him so tightly that the effort was a failure.

There was another pause, punctuated by applause. Pollux was breathing hard, and beginning to show ill temper. He seemed fairly to grind his teeth as he advanced on Baudouin for the third round.

The manœuvre he attempted this time was a very hazardous one: he rushed on his adversary head down,

with the object of seizing him by the legs and landing him on his back, heels in air, before he was aware of what was going on.

But Baudouin, swift as thought, was ready with the riposte. He coiled his arms around the darky's neck, tripped him, raised him off the ground, and, whirling him in air as if he had been a sack of meal, landed him plump on his two shoulders.

Pollux was "downed;" the fact was incontestible.

A storm of acclamations greeted our friend's victory, while he was returning to us with a rather sheepish face and Pollux was picking himself up in confusion.

Baudouin's skin was stained here and there with spots of black, as if the sham negro's pigment had rubbed off on him.

"I am a big fool!" he said, as he reached us and began to throw on his clothes.

We were preparing to leave, together with the other spectators, for the show seemed to be over, when, suddenly, the voice of the man in the nankin waistcoat made itself heard again.

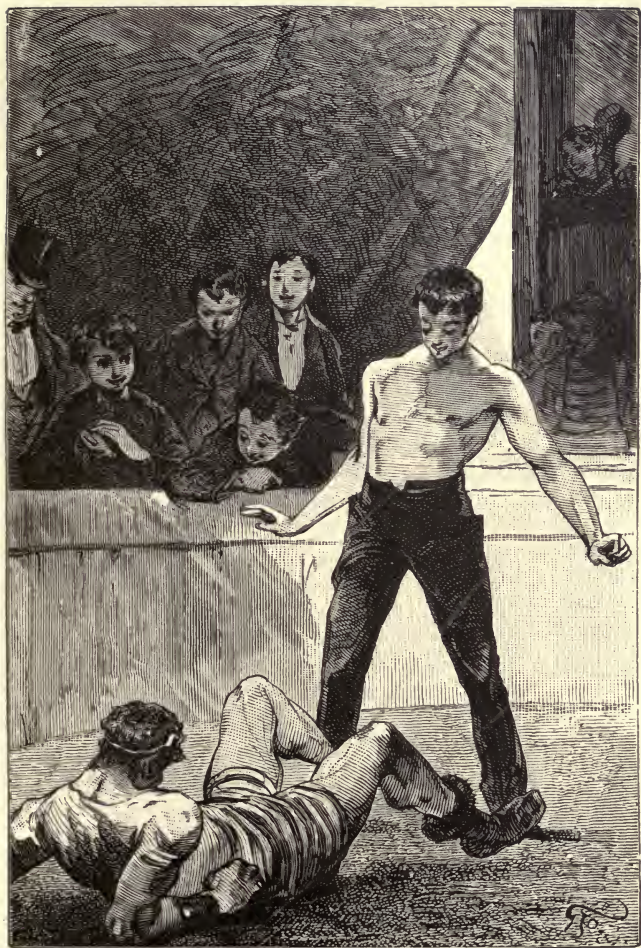
"Well, that prize of twenty-five francs! have we heard the last of it?"

"Yes, the twenty-five francs! where are the twenty-five francs promised to the victor?" echoed, in muffled tones at first and then with increasing vigour, some of those around him.

In an instant a storm was raging. The assemblage yelled in chorus, to the tune of *les Champions*, "The twenty-five francs! The twenty-five francs!"

M. Monin-Javot came forward, pale, but suave as ever, a smile upon his lips.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a fine air of misprized loyalty, "permit me to inform the honest individuals, whose



“POLLUX WAS ‘DOWNED;’ THE FACT WAS INCONTESTABLE.”

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voices I hear raised in remonstrance, that they are interfering in a matter that should be confined to *mossieu* (designating Baudouin) and me. I am ready to pay *mossieu* the reward to which he is entitled, but I am too conscious of what I owe to myself, and of what I owe to the distinguished amateur who has just afforded one of our troupe the honour of trying his strength with him, to discuss in public a question of pecuniary interest. No, gentlemen; that is not my way of doing business."

"The twenty-five francs!" bawled one of the spectators, unmoved by these considerations of refined courtesy. "Pay the twenty-five francs you promised!"

"Gentlemen," M. Monin-Javot replied, with inexhaustible patience, "all the money at my disposal at the present moment is in pieces of five and ten centimes. You would not wish me to force *mossieu* to receive payment in coppers? Vigorous as he is, he would scarcely be able to carry away such a burden."

This argument appeared to produce a certain effect.

"He is right," said some of the more moderate ones.

But he of the nankin waistcoat was merciless.

"It is a matter that can be easily arranged," he said. "I will undertake to furnish gold, right here and now, for all those coppers. I am in need of small change, anyway, in my butcher business."

The audience returned to its original impression.

"That settles the matter, then. Let the twenty-five francs be paid!"

Here Baudouin felt it his duty to interfere.

"Faith," he said, "since you force me to it, I must confess that it was not the desire of gaining the money that induced me to enter the ring, and I am perfectly willing to abandon all claim to it."

"Ah, ha!" sneered the man of the waistcoat, "did n't I tell you the business was a fraud?"

M. Monin-Javot, who was mopping his forehead with a dirty handkerchief, gave a great bound at this application of the spur.

"Bring hither the treasure chest!" he said, with a majestic air.

The Eel and the Florentine Bronze, with slow and reluctant steps, brought to the centre of the ring a large black box, having a small slot in its lid. The poor devils' looks of distress would have softened the hardest heart, and the least imaginative could have divined that they were solemnizing the obsequies of their hopes of dinner.

In the meantime, M. Monin-Javot had opened the box and was extracting in great handfuls the day's receipts. The sous, when arranged in order on the lid and counted, were found to reach the sum of twenty-five francs. The overplus did not exceed sixty centimes, however.

"No, I really cannot take that money!" said Baudouin, stoutly, but, nevertheless, intimidated by the severe eye of the man of the waistcoat.

At this moment, there was a sudden commotion in the group surrounding us, which parted and made way for an officer resplendent in full uniform, sword at side, helmet on head, epaulettes of bullion on the shoulders.

"Captain Biradent!" I shouted, joyfully.

"Captain Biradent!" Baudouin and Verschuren repeated after me.

"Yes, Captain Biradent; and just in time to prevent you from completing a foolish action!" he growled, between his teeth, with that rough frankness and southern accent which were so familiar to us.

“Who is there here that dares to speak of fraud in connection with a young man who wears the uniform?” he roared. “The first man who ventures to repeat that insinuation shall answer for it to me!”

No one breathed a word. The man of the waistcoat made an abortive attempt to hide behind two thin spectators.

“I thank you, monsieur, but keep your money.” Baudouin rapidly said, happy to escape from the menaced payment.

“That is well,” said the captain. “And now — by the right flank — ’arch!”

Mechanically obeying the command once so familiar in our ears, we hurried from the tent.

The captain did not appear to be over well pleased with us.

“How is this,” he said, when we had left the booth a little way behind us. “How comes it that I find young gentlemen of birth and education, who have their degrees, wrestling in public with vulgar harlequins? Gentlemen, I am ashamed of you!”

“Come, come, captain,” Baudouin replied, with his frank and merry laugh, “you must not be too hard on us. It is partly your fault, confound it! If you had not given us such good muscles in the gymnasium at Châtillon, we should never have thought of exercising them here.”

The implied compliment went direct to the heart of the worthy man.

“There is some truth in that, there is some truth in that,” he said, with a smile. “But try next time to make a better selection of your adversary. And what are you doing at Saint-Germain, if I am not too inquisitive?”

“We are here for a class dinner, which, by the way, will deprive us of the pleasure of being with you as long as we should like, for I hear the clock striking six.”

We all directed our steps toward the Pavilion. On the way the captain informed me that he was in Paris for a week's stay; I availed myself of the opportunity to ask him to come and dine with my mother on the following day, which he promised he would do. My father, in celebration of my honours, had already invited M. Pellerin, M. Aveline, and M. Desbans.

“Come along, there; we are waiting for you!” was the salutation we received from a score of our comrades whose joyous faces filled the windows of the restaurant. We gave the captain's hand a parting clasp. He, too, had a dinner of his corps to attend that evening, and could not have kept us company.

We darted up the staircase.

The scene of the festivities was a large room on the first floor, which we had no difficulty in finding without other guide than the uproar that already prevailed there. Boisterous objurgations greeted our entrance.

“Here come the laggards! Why didn't you keep us waiting a little longer? Come, let's sit down!”

There was a momentary confusion, a crash of chairs, and a clatter of plates. Then we found ourselves seated in compact order, elbows touching, the entire thirty-one of us, around a long, wide table. I was seated between Baudouin and Verschuren, and opposite me was the shining face of Chavasse, of whom I had occasional glimpses through the mountains of fruit and flowers, the pyramids of nougat, and the various other structures of culinary architecture with which the table was loaded. Two or three glasses were arrayed beside each plate, a

menu on heavy glazed paper was laid over the knife and fork, and the resolute faces that surrounded the handsome display testified sufficiently to the ardour with which we were prepared to enter on our labours.

The dinner was good, notwithstanding the fearful and wonderful names with which the chef, aided and abetted by our committee men, had considered it necessary to disguise his dishes.

The repast was much more quiet than might have been expected from the earlier portion of our afternoon. In the first place, we were all provided with an appetite which checked any disposition to engage in wordy warfare when there was so much better employment for our masticatory apparatus. Next, we had contracted at the lycée the excellent habit of behaving like gentlemen at table. Finally, finding ourselves arrayed around the board at a sort of public banquet, and subjected to the scrutiny of the numerous attendants, we felt that the good name of our college was in our charge and that it behooved us not to disgrace our uniform.

It was as much as ever if Thomereau ventured on two or three pleasantries of a doubtful character, which were at once nipped in the bud by the freezing coldness with which they were received, or if the conversation rose above its normal diapason when the famous ducks of Rouen made their appearance on a bed of academic laurels, — a circumstance that had failed to enter into Molécule's calculations. At dessert, however, when the golden champagne was mantling in the glasses, he was allowed to read his little poem, which we applauded in recognition of his good intention.

The evening would have been uneventful if the unfortunate Chavasse, after partaking twice of every dish, and

literally stuffing himself with indigestible pastry, had not crowned his exploits by insisting on smoking the biggest and blackest cigar that the establishment could produce.

This imprudence resulted in consequences on which the reader will pardon me if I draw the curtain, and which obliged our unhappy comrade, after a silent but decisive conflict, to beat a precipitate retreat to the cool, calm regions of the terrace.

By ten o'clock all was over, and we took the train to return to Paris.

CHAPTER XXI.

AUNT AUBERT'S IRE.

IT was past eleven o'clock when Baudouin and I reached Billancourt, and I was surprised to see a light still shining from the windows of the drawing-room. Had mamma been sitting up for us? The thought distressed me. She to whom rest and tranquillity were such absolute necessities.

She was not the only one who received us with a little cry of joy on recognizing our footsteps on the stoop: Aunt Aubert, my father, and grandpa, were also watching. No one had cared to go to bed without knowing that we were home.

Nothing would do but we must relate our adventures; it needs not to say that one of the episodes of our afternoon was treated very gingerly. Not a word was lisped of Baudouin's victory in the Monin-Javot arena. The meeting with Captain Biradent and the duck dinner formed the staple of our narrative.

We had just concluded it when a loud ring at the bell of the front door caused us all to start.

Who could it be at such an hour?

I ran to the window, and, to my extreme surprise, recognized M. Pellerin. I bounded down the stairs, taking four at a leap, to receive him at the threshold.

“Ah, Albert, is that you?” he said. “Observing that you had not gone to bed, I thought there would be no harm in stopping and ringing at your bell.”

From the moment I set eyes on him I had been struck by my dear master's grave, almost solemn appearance. This impression was enhanced when, after the usual salutations and additional excuses for so untimely a visit, he seated himself. An inexpressible air of constraint and gloom apparent in his manner and on his countenance told us that so unusual a proceeding was not without a motive, and that that motive could not be good news. We awaited developments with an anxious curiosity that we found it difficult to hold in check.

At last M. Pellerin seemed to nerve himself to speak.

“I have a communication of an entirely commercial nature to make to you,” he said to my father; “will it not be better to spare the ladies' ears?”

“For weal, for woe,” replied my father, “we have everything here in common. Speak, M. Pellerin, as if you had but a single listener.”

M. Pellerin bowed slightly.

“Do you still continue to have business relations with Lecache's firm?” he asked, in an agitated voice.

“Certainly,” replied my father, more and more surprised, and with sudden alarm. “They are our bankers and have charge of our financial matters. All our fortune, ready money and securities, is in their hands.”

“Ah! — it is as I had feared,” M. Pellerin replied, more dejectedly even than before, “and that is why I came without an instant's delay to apprise you of what is going on. You are possibly aware that to-morrow I am to deliver the customary Latin address at the ceremony of awarding the prizes of the general examinations. I was

tendered a dinner by some friends this evening in celebration of that honour, and after the repast we dropped in at one of the principal cafés of the Boulevard des Italiens. It seems that the place is a sort of exchange, and business men were there in numbers. We were not long in perceiving that an important bit of news was in circulation through the room; so great was the interest that it appeared to excite among many of the gentlemen, that we heard it repeated several times from one table to another —”

“And what was the nature of that news?” asked my father, who had suddenly become deathly pale.

“That Lecachey’s bank must inevitably close its doors to-morrow morning. Young Lecachey, that horrible little ne’er-do-well that you know of, disappeared last Saturday, having first made fraudulent use of the firm signature to withdraw several millions—two or three millions, it is reported—of bonds and securities deposited with the Bank of France to the credit of the concern.”

“Two or three millions!” exclaimed my father. “If that is true, it means certain ruin!”

“I am afraid there is not much room for doubt. Full details were given, with figures. The Lecachey bank, so everybody said, has for a long time been anything but safe. There was talk of heavy losses on the Bourse, of extravagant and unjustifiable expenses. I immediately thought of you, and hoped that if warned at once you might do something to protect yourself. In any event, I thought it my duty to put you in possession of the facts without loss of a minute’s time.”

My father, in an attitude of deep discouragement, his eye lost in space, shook his head mournfully, while my mother, Aunt Aubert, and grandpa, standing around him

in funereal silence, hung on his lips, and waited to hear him pronounce the verdict.

"It means bankruptcy!" he said at last, in broken accents, as if the hateful word were strangling him. "Or if not that, then utter ruin for us all. All the proceeds of last year's sales, all my bills receivable were in Lecachey's hands. And that at the end of my first year's business, when I had sown and had not had time to reap. All will have to go to pay off the liabilities —"

"But you talk as if Lecachey had already suspended," said mamma. "How do you know, my friend, that he will not weather the storm, that an arrangement will not be effected?"

"I know it, everything tells me so!" my father vehemently replied. "Other houses might stand such a loss; Lecachey cannot. I reproach myself for having done nothing to avert the consequences of such a catastrophe, for I have felt, and on more than one occasion, that it was liable to happen. The memory of kindnesses extended to me by Lecachey when I was starting in the business made it hard for me to reciprocate the trust he put in me with suspicion. Two or three millions are a large figure for a house whose stability is already distrusted. And if they have allowed the report to gain currency, or rather, as there is little room to doubt, they themselves have helped to circulate it, it is because they can see no possible remedy, and their decision is arrived at."

All those things my father said coldly and in tones bordering on moroseness. But that coldness and that moroseness caused us less anxiety than the state of mute prostration in which we had observed him to be sunk for the last few minutes. It is my belief that my

mother excited and pestered him purposely with her contradictions, solely that she might not see him overcome again by that dejection.

“Even though you should sustain a great loss,” she said, “surely it cannot amount to utter ruin. You own the factory and the machinery, your credit is unimpaired, and you have advantageous contracts with the best raisers —”

“Yes, oh yes, I have all those things!” my father bitterly replied. “That is the way you women look at such matters! You know, though, do you not, my dear, that we are doing business on the proceeds of the loan hypothecated on our real estate, and which amounts to three hundred and eighty thousand francs? We have with Lecachey, in the shape of deposits and time loans, six hundred thousand francs. If that sum is lost to us — and, unfortunately, there seems to be but little doubt that such is the case — a suit in foreclosure is inevitable, for I shall be unable to continue the business and, consequently, shall not be able to pay the interest on the loan. My equity in the mortgaged property does not exceed one-third of its value, — hence you can see that a foreclosure under such circumstances is equivalent to absolute ruin, neither more nor less. I believe, I trust, however, providing the disaster has no further consequences, that I shall be able to meet my engagements. But there is no use attempting to conceal the fact, that is the very best that I can hope for, and in all probability we shall be left without resources. You see, my dear, that I do not try to delude you with false hopes.”

I had approached my father, and, taking his hand in mine, endeavoured to cheer him with warm expressions of affection.

"My dear son," he said, touching my forehead with his lips, "it is not for my own sake that I regret our fondly cherished dream, it is for yours, for whom I had hoped to smooth the road that you are about to find so rough!"

"Oh! as for me, father, you need not be troubled in the least!" I cried. "There is no difficulty from which a man cannot extricate himself by patient labour, and I shall be so happy to work for you, for mamma, for all of you! What is the difference, after all! Instead of studying law, an expensive profession to master, and slow in its results, I will adopt a more modest calling that will yield quick returns."

"And such a calling is open to you," said M. Pellerin. "Why should not Albert enter the Normal School? With his prize in history and his two accessits, it will be a matter easy of accomplishment. You are aware that all the scholars there are pensioners of the State. Albert can spend three years there under the best instructors in Paris, receive his diploma, and at once obtain a professorship in a lycée. Teaching is a career of great promise, and which cannot fail to be attractive, even from a material point of view. France is in need of competent teachers, and will find before long that she must pay them in other coin than consideration. And if my young friend here feels no inclination for the professorial career, there are other reputable callings whose doors will be opened to him by the training he will receive in the Rue d'Ulm. Literature, the higher journalism, posts in the public service, private positions of trust, are all, at all times, ready and anxious to give employment to graduates of the Normal School."

In moments of despair the troubled and vacillating mind grasps at anything that affords ground for hope. It

was evident, from the interest awakened in my father by this discussion, that it had been beneficial to him, if in nothing else than by diverting his thoughts from the painful anxieties that were torturing him.

Baudouin, who had preserved silence until now, here offered a suggestion :

“In case none of those projects should prove agreeable to Albert,” he said, “I have another to propose to him — indeed, I may say that I have two. The first is to embark with me for Australia or South America, where we will make our fortune as so many others have done before us —”

At this point M. Pellerin frowned, significantly.

“The second is to lead the life of a trapper right here in Paris, living like a hermit, while laying in your store of knowledge, and come and share my room with me.”

“Your room?” I queried, in astonishment.

“Yes ; my mind is made up to enter the Art School and be a sculptor,— unless you think you would rather go to Rio Janeiro and be a cow-puncher. I have made inquiries and been in correspondence with my good mother on the question of ways and means, and this is what I am going to do : I shall hire, somewhere over in the direction of the Boulevard Montparnasse, a chamber that will cost me sixty francs a year. I shall furnish it with a bed, two chairs, a table, a few toilet and kitchen utensils, all which mamma will send me from Bourgas, with what linen may be required. I have calculated that I shall be able to live in clover on seven hundred francs a year. My budget is made up : rent, sixty francs ; provisions, that I propose to cook myself, soldier fashion, one franc a day — three hundred and sixty-five francs a year ; fuel and gas, fifty francs ; laundry and clothing, two hundred francs ; inci-



dentals, seventy-five francs. So you see it is a question of earning sixty-two to sixty-three francs a month to enable me to model at my ease. The deuce is in it if I can't obtain pupils, secure copying to do, or get some kind of a job of that nature that will afford me the desired income. At the start, if necessary, to overcome the initial difficulties, I will give the half, or even two-thirds of my time. But it is evident that the plan could be carried out by two much more cheaply than by one: the larger expenses, such as those for rent, heating and lighting, would be halved, the cost of provisions reduced by a clear third. I am certain that we could manage to live on fifty francs a month. A fellow can carry a hod at a pinch, if driven to it! The great point is to have a definite object in view and never lose sight of it.

Baudouin, usually so shy and silent, spoke with singular enthusiasm. It was clear that he was giving us the abstract and epitome of his inmost reflections, his secret and his scheme of life. He had nothing else that he could call his own,—he bestowed it on us freely.

As for me, and this will not surprise those who stop to think how old I was at that time, this picture of a joyous partnership in poverty attracted me powerfully,—“mad cow” appears so appetizing to one, so long as he is not obliged to make it his regular diet. But M. Pellerin did not allow me time to contemplate this beatific dream.

“My dear young friend,” he said to Baudouin, “to look unmoved on the prospect of from ten to fifteen years' unceasing struggle against the meanest and most repulsive difficulties of life, with artistic glory as the guerdon at the end, is characteristic of a valiant soul. But it is one of those exceptional enterprises in which no one should embark unless he is sure he has the sacred fire. Adopt that

course if you feel your loins are strong enough for it, but do not counsel others to follow your example. Let Albert pursue a smoother road, which will be for that reason a safer one."

Here Aunt Aubert joined in the conversation.

"That is well said," she declared, "and it is the first sensible word I have heard spoken this night. I really cannot help thinking I am dreaming, hearing you all talk as if we were to be knocking at the poorhouse door to-morrow. You owe a great deal of money, then?" she asked, addressing my father.

"No, thank God. I settled last month for our last cargoes of beets, and the accounts are balanced."

"What, you owe nothing and give way to despair? If I understand aright, you lose by Lecachey's failure all your working capital, together with the profits of the year?"

"That is correct."

"That being the case, there is nothing to prevent the business going on if you could obtain fresh capital?"

"No, certainly."

"And is three hundred to four hundred thousand francs the smallest sum that you can go on with?"

"Oh, no! certainly not. The half of it would answer, and even less. I would conduct the business on a more modest scale, that's all."

"That is what I supposed. You see that everything is arranged and that there is no necessity for worrying an instant longer."

My father wondered whether Aunt Aubert were not taking leave of her senses.

"Why do you look at me in that way?" she went on. "The matter is perfectly simple, and I think that I talk

French. I have eight thousand two hundred francs of rente on the *grand livre*, haven't I? and I have always been counting on leaving them to that great nephew of mine. Very well; you take them to-morrow morning, you convert them into cabbages, or turnips, or loaves of sugar — and there you are! The business runs along as if on wheels, you pay the interest on your loan, you extinguish the loan itself by instalments, and you give no more thought to Lecachey, Son & Company than if those amiable individuals had never been born."

"Oh, Aunt Aubert! It is out of the question! — we can never agree to that!" cried in chorus my father, mamma, and grandpa.

Aunt Aubert drew herself up to her full height. I never saw her really angry but once in my life, and that was on this present occasion.

"Out of the question! Can never agree to it! I should like to know what you mean, if you please!" she cried, in a tone that admitted of no reply. "Have I not been eating your bread for sixteen years? Am I a stranger in this house? Are we to begin at this late day to figure up what is one's and what is another's? So be it, then. I will go pack my trunk and leave you, this instant. I shall take Albert with me, though, understand! He is the only one who loves me here —"

My mother and I went to Aunt Aubert and threw our arms about her neck. The dear lady was looking for her shawl; in her righteous indignation it seemed to her that she needed no other preparation for departure. We embraced her, tenderly, seeking to appease her with soothing words.

"No, you are a set of ingrates, all is at an end between us. I am going — I shall take an apartment in the quar-



“ I SHALL TAKE ALBERT WITH ME, UNDERSTAND ! ”

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ter of the Pantheon. Albert will come and live with me and pursue his legal studies. My mind is quite made up unless you people here can give up treating me as a stranger."

Her anger had given way to more tender sentiments and she was weeping hot tears; there was nothing left for us to do but humbly ask forgiveness and accept her offer. My father was both deeply affected and provoked.

"If I yield to you," he said, "it can only be on one condition, — that you become a partner in the concern and let me act as your attorney."

In her present frame of mind Aunt Aubert was prepared to make any concession. This scruple amused her, however.

"Arrange matters to suit yourself, it is your business; I know nothing whatever about it, nor do I wish to know. The main point is that Albert shall be at liberty to choose a career to his liking. Further than that I ask for nothing."

What answer was there to arguments like these? We could only bow before such disinterested kindness.

In the mutual tenderness of the members of a family, when manifested in actions like my aunt's, there is a secret virtue that dilates the heart and elevates it above the calamity of the moment. Misfortune, even, is not without its attendant solace: it serves to bring to light the affection and devotion of those around us.

Again, it is the property of these great moral disturbances to show life as in epitome and indicate by a sudden inspiration the safest road to follow. But now you were undecided, you knew not which way to turn. Now the veil is stripped away, and you see distinctly in which direction your duty lies.

That is what occurred in my case.

“Dear father,” I suddenly said, “since you are going to have Aunt Aubert as your partner, why not take me as your aide-de-camp? Your task henceforth will be one that will tax your strength, you will have need of a reliable and devoted assistant. Suffer me to be that assistant. The education that you have given me will not interfere with my becoming a good mechanic. And besides, I can complete it by special studies while learning the rudiments of the business, since, thanks to your foresight, my time has been shared between scientific and literary pursuits. I entreat you, father, let me have the pleasure of assisting you in repairing our disaster.”

My father’s only reply was to fold me in his arms with an eloquent tenderness which said :

“So let it be !”

When M. Pellerin left us about midnight the clouds seemed to have passed away and our sky to have resumed its serenity. Aunt Aubert’s confidence and good cheer had completed the work of her generous sacrifice.

We would have kept our excellent friend and given him a bed, but he said he must go home and look over his Latin oration for the last time. There was almost a smile on my father’s face as he thanked the professor for coming so far to warn us of the impending disaster, and when we retired, after a mutual exchange of heartfelt embraces, it was with a sensation of pride and gratitude that we were blessed with such good friends, and of renewed strength due to the virile resolutions that the unforeseen catastrophe had shown us to be necessary.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE SORBONNE. — A BUNCH OF PRIZES. — LATEST INTELLIGENCE. — CONCLUSION.

WHEN morning came, however, black care had reasserted its rights. My father had gone out early in quest of information. He had ascertained that there was no possible doubt as to the downfall of the Lecachey bank, and when brought face to face with stern figures and realities he could not find it in his heart to be cheerful in presence of the ruin of all his hopes.

“The wreck is complete, ship and cargo,” he said to us at breakfast, “but our honour is safe.”

He would not absent himself from the distribution of the prizes awarded at the annual examinations. The ceremony, as was the custom, took place in the great amphitheatre of the Sorbonne. He had found places for himself, mamma, Aunt Aubert, and grandpa in the gallery to the left of the stage, not far from where Père Plaisir, Mounerol’s grandfather, was seated, who had come up to town that morning rejoicing in a brand-new suit of clothes purchased expressly for the great occasion. On the benches, that rose in tiers, were the noisy, clattering undergraduates, in uniform or plain clothes, according as they hailed from Sainte-Barbe or Descartes, Saint-Louis or Condorcet, Rollin or Charlemagne, Stanislas or Montaigne. On every side elegant toilets, the rustling of silks, the tossing

of feathers and flowers, the waving of fans, the charming faces of mothers and sisters.

My place was in the front row of my lycée, where Payan, Dutheil, Ségol, and Baudouin were my neighbours. But in the midst of all that jollity it almost broke my heart to see the look of profound melancholy that was reflected in my father's dull and vacant eyes. It was evident that the idea of his — or rather our — disaster had taken possession of him and would not be dispossessed. Grief for losing in a day the fruit of so many years of patient toil, the reproaches that he heaped on himself for having risked the means that should have been devoted to the support of his family, and, yet more, perhaps, mortification that he was powerless to retrieve his position without endangering Aunt Aubert's little fortune, — all these considerations preyed on his mind and destroyed all interest in the gay spectacle that lay before him.

It was in vain that mamma tried to divert him by pointing out the distinguished persons in the boxes. It was in vain that he himself made an effort from time to time to speak a word of kindness to Père Plaisir and explain to him what was going on before his eyes, — the one dominant idea quickly recovered its ascendancy and my father again gave way to his sorrowful reflections. He hardly raised his head when the roll of the drums announced the arrival of the official cortège.

He watched, with languid interest, the procession defile upon the stage, the Minister of Public Instruction in rich ceremonial attire, the Academicians in their dress coats embroidered with green palm-branches, the Faculties preceded by their mace-bearers, the great dignitaries, senators, generals, and councillors of State, interspersed with judicial and municipal magistrates, the vice-rector of

the University and his corps of inspectors, the principals and professors of colleges in gown and red or yellow cap, and, bringing up the rear, the young men of the Normal School, their buttonholes decked with violets.

When all these notables had obtained seats, the dignitaries and invited guests upon the platform, the masters and prospective professors on the lower benches of the amphitheatre, the Minister called the assemblage to order, and requested M. Pellerin to proceed with his oration.

I saw my father's face brighten for an instant at mention of the familiar name. He bent forward in his seat in order that he might hear more distinctly, and was evidently summoning up his oldtime memories of Latin to catch the meaning of the first periods of the well-turned address. Two or three times, when some more than usually happy allusion was greeted by the audience with applause, I saw a faint smile play about his dear lips. But presently, as if soothed by some soporific influence in the stately periods that sounded in his ears, he appeared to lose consciousness of what was going on around him, and sank back into his previous condition of atony.

M. Pellerin's oration, however, delivered in a clear and well-modulated voice, was an undoubted success. Connoisseurs admired it for its pure Latinity, and others for its covert allusions, which more learned friends translated for their benefit. He had, moreover, a merit that is as highly appreciated as it is rare: he was brief, and in consequence received the unanimous applause of the mammas and little sisters as well as the papas and students.

Then the Minister who presided came forward and spoke, in French on this occasion, not only to the audience of the Sorbonne, one might say, but to France and to all Europe. He mentioned the innovations and improve-

ments that had been introduced into the system during the current year and those that he had in mind for the coming year. His address had all the significance of a manifesto, and, as it unfolded its somewhat prosy length, reporters might be seen speeding away to their respective offices to give the paper the words of wisdom that they had caught hot from the speaker's mouth.

My father alone appeared to take no interest in the proceedings, and to have ears only for the torturing reflections that were rankling in his bosom.

At last the, to us, important ceremony of conferring the honours began. The Minister in person announced the recipient of the great prize in mathematics, and bestowed his crown on Payan. Then came the inferior prizes, announced by the inspector of the academy, and the prizes of honour in philosophy and rhetoric, which were awarded respectively by the First President of the Court of Cassation and the Commander-in-chief of the army.

I observed a singular phenomenon, which was that the applause of the audience was regulated, as was the number of volumes given as prizes, by the importance of the subject. Thus, each prize of honour consisted of forty sumptuously bound volumes, with the arms of the Sorbonne and the legend "*Concours Général*" stamped on the covers, and gave rise to repeated salvos of applause. The winners of first and second prizes, who got respectively six and four volumes, received in the former case two salvos, in the latter one. Finally, the names of the accessit men, who got no books at all, were generally rattled off with strange rapidity, in the midst of a contemptuous silence. Sometimes, however, it chanced that the name of an honour man, who had been called up more than once even

for accessits, or was an especial favourite with his comrades, aroused the enthusiasm of his lycée — which generally provoked reprisals on the part of a rival lycée, at the first opportunity.

Another fact worthy of mention: the prize of honour in rhetoric received the heartiest ovation of all.

Greatly to my satisfaction, it was at last given me on this occasion to see an appreciable effect produced among the occupants of the left-hand gallery.

At the moment when Mounerol mounted the platform to receive his crown, I saw my father grasp the hand of Père Plaisir, who was shedding tears of joy, and give it a cordial shake. Then, when my name was called for the first time in French composition and was cheered by the Montaignes, I saw my father smile on me, affectionately, while mamma, Aunt Aubert, and grandpa craned their heads forward as if saying:

“He is our boy! that is our Albert!”

But now the inspector, to whom of right belongs the privilege of reading the honour lists, has passed the schedule to an illustrious savant, full of years and glory, who rises and says:

“Grand prize in history, founded by the Historical Society of France. First prize, Albert Besnard, freshman, of the Lycée Montaigne.”

Thunders of applause. I rise with unsteady steps, I mount the platform, I receive my crown and forty volumes, and return to my seat among my comrades, who howl, clap, and stamp their feet in a way to make one fear for the safety of the building. I finally have a chance to give a look at my parents. What words are capable of expressing my delight on beholding the change that has come over my father's countenance?

His sorrows have fled and left him. He has forgotten that he has so lately lost a fortune. His dear face is as I love to see it, cheerful and smiling, and is no longer darkened by the cloud of melancholy that has rested on it all the morning.

Ah, how deeply I felt at that moment what joy and comfort the least successes of their children afford loving parents! How clearly it dawned upon my mind, that work, and work alone, is the great remedy for the troubles and cares of life! How I thanked in my heart M. Pellerin for having restored to me my studious habits and M. Aveline for having shown me the right way of learning history! How I vowed to myself that never, never should my father have reason to wear a face other than that he wore then, the face of happy days and hours of triumph.

The reign of sadness ended with that moment. It had vanished utterly. I saw my father chatting with Père Plaisir, asking him for latest news from Châtillon, questioning him as to his plans for the future. And Aunt Aubert! and mamma! and grandpa! surely, no one looking at them would ever have imagined that ruin and disaster were seated at our hearth. My prize in history had outweighed the half million and more that had taken wing and vanished.

But the ceremony, like all things earthly, came to an end. In the twinkling of an eye, with that celerity for which Parisian assemblages are noticeable, the great amphitheatre was empty. My father had invited Jean Mounerol and his grandfather to dine with us. The presence of two first honour men in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, as may be imagined, caused no little commotion. Our books formed quite a library, — no less than two cabs were

needed to transport them. And then the adieux, the embraces, and hand-shakings that remained to be exchanged with those good and loyal comrades, many of whom, unable to obtain access to the amphitheatre, had crowded around the doors to cheer us at our exit. All these circumstances did not help to facilitate our movements, and but for Baudouin we might never have got away. But nothing was capable of daunting him. He ran around in the Boulevard Saint-Michel and engaged carriages, brought them back in triumph, amid the envious glances of the throng, anxious to be gone, and piled our prizes on the driver's seat, stuffed them into corners, bestowed them wherever there was an inch of room.

And he, too, although he little suspected it, was to have his prize of honour.

While we were waiting for M. Pellerin, who was to return with us to Billancourt, and had left us a moment to lay aside his gown, Père Plaisir pricked up his ears on hearing the name Baudouin mentioned.

"Excuse me, monsieur," he said, "but are you Monsieur Jacques Baudouin, of Bourgas, near Châtillon?"

"Of course I am, Père Plaisir; you know me well enough, and, believe me, I am delighted to meet you here again on such an auspicious occasion."

"Ah! you will excuse me; you see my eyesight is not as good as it used to be, and then you have grown so since you left us. But that is neither here nor there, — I have a letter for you from the mayor of Châtillon."

"From the mayor of Châtillon? Indeed! I wonder what he can have to say to me," Baudouin exclaimed, while Père Plaisir, after fumbling in his pockets for quite a while, finally produced an official looking document bearing the seal of the *mairie*.

“I know nothing of what is in it. M. le Maire did n't tell me. Hearing that I was coming up to Paris to see my grandson receive his prizes, he just handed me this, and told me to be sure to give it to you in person.”

Baudouin broke the seal and read aloud :

“Monsieur : — I have the pleasure to inform you that the municipal council of Châtillon-Sur-Lèze, having been apprised of the remarkable talent, in the opinion of experts, exhibited by you in matters of art, and of your determination to devote yourself to the study of sculpture, and having further ascertained that you are the only son of a widow and without means for your support while pursuing the aforesaid studies, has at its meeting of this day adopted the following resolution :

“First — A donation of one thousand francs, from the funds of the commune, is hereby voted to M. Jacques Baudouin to enable him to pursue his studies at the École des Beaux-arts in Paris.

“Secondly — This subvention shall be renewed at the expiration of the year on receipt of a satisfactory report from the director of the school.

“Be pleased to accept, monsieur, the assurance of my distinguished consideration.

“HENRI JUHEL,

“*Mayor of Châtillon.*”

“To Monsieur Jacques Baudouin, inmate of the Lycée Montaigne, Paris.”

“This is M. Pellerin's doing, I would n't be afraid to swear to it!” exclaimed Baudouin, red with surprise and delight, while we embraced him as if we would devour him.

At this moment, M. Pellerin was seen descending the staircase from the cloak-room.

We were astounded to see that he, usually so sedate, who had just delivered the Latin oration of the year, was running, actually running toward us. A professor of rheto-



“BAUDOUIN BROKE THE SEAL AND READ ALOUD.”

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ric! In the courtyard of the Sorbonne! Had those venerable walls ever witnessed such a sight before!

He held in his hand a newspaper, which he waved above his head as he approached us.

“Great news!” he shouted, from a distance. “The disaster is averted, Monsieur Besnard! Here is the first edition of the *Temps*; a friend just gave it me. Read what it says under the heading ‘Latest!’”

My father took the paper, and, following Baudouin’s example, read aloud:

“LATEST. Amsterdam, Monday, 2.50 A.M. — The young man, Lecachey, who robbed his father’s bank of two million eight hundred and thirty-nine thousand francs, and absconded, was arrested on board the steamer *Weser*, just as she was on the point of sailing for New York. He had taken passage under a fictitious name, but broke down under the adroit questioning of the detectives, admitted his identity, and made a full confession. The entire sum was found in his travelling bag, with the exception of two one thousand-franc notes, which he had converted into gold before leaving Paris. The courts have taken cognizance of the affair, and the criminal’s extradition will probably be granted within two or three days.”

And to the despatch was appended the following news item:

“P.S. — We learn that Lecachey’s bank, which was compelled to close its doors in consequence of the above-mentioned defalcation, will proceed to liquidate, and probably pay its creditors a dividend of from forty to fifty per cent.”

A great load was removed from my father’s bosom; the deep sigh of relief he gave spoke eloquently of the sufferings of the past eighteen hours. He kissed my mother and me in silence, then took Aunt Aubert’s hand and raised it respectfully to his lips.

“Come, come, cousin! are you going to stand on ceremony with me again to-day?” she said, kissing him in turn, and more deeply moved by his little demonstration than she cared to show. “Let us be off at once for Billancourt, else I shall not be in time to look to the dinner!”

That the drive home was merry, the repast cordial and joyous, are facts that I think no one will dispute.

M. Pellerin, M. Aveline, M. Desbans, Captain Biradent, Père Plaisir, and Criquet, all seated around our board, a prize of honour in the house, a thousand-franc scholarship for Baudouin, the half of a large fortune recovered as if by miracle, — and, withal, a variety of delicious little dishes prepared by Aunt Aubert’s own fair hands, — assuredly these things were more than sufficient to put us all in high good humour. I shall not attempt to repeat the toasts that were drunk at dessert to the success of the three representatives of the future who were seated at that friendly board, but looking back from a distance of fifteen years, it is gratifying to reflect that all those kind wishes have been fully realized.

Jacques Baudouin, entering the *École des Beaux-arts* that same year, three years later a student in Rome under the auspices of the State, is now, as everybody is aware, one of those whose achievements in sculpture reflect glory upon France. He has lately been given an order for some important work for the City of Paris; his fame is growing every day, and, while waiting for a fortune, he enjoys a competency. He has never ceased to be my best friend.

Jean Mounerol, graduating from the *École Normale* with the highest honours, is to-day one of the most eloquent and popular professors of the *Collège de France*.

As for myself, my three children, for whom I have thrown together these brief recollections, know that I chose a career less brilliant than that of my two friends, and sought an independence in the pursuits of business, at the side of my father, of whom I was long the assistant, whose partner I am to-day. Happiness, as much of it as I could wish for, I have never failed to find in the society of their lovely mother, my own, and our dear Aunt Aubert.

Our circumstances have not always been as prosperous as they are now. Notwithstanding Aunt Aubert's generous devotion, and the recovery of a portion of the Lecachey indebtedness, times have occasionally been hard with us.

That partial recovery, even, was very slow, for the wound inflicted on the credit of the bank ultimately proved fatal to it; it never regained its former standing, and the unhappy Lecachey, ruined by the criminal folly of his son, and the universal censure, which affixed an indelible stigma to his name, was obliged to leave the country.

It needed the united efforts of us all to stem the tide of difficulties, force our way upward, step by step, to the position we occupied before, and, at the end of ten years of unremitting toil, make good our deficit. And it is a subject of no little pride to me to reflect that, but for my assistance, my father would probably never have attained this end. It is to the simplification of the processes of manufacture, the secret of which, thanks to my knowledge of English, I was able to bring back with me from Great Britain after several months spent in investigating the methods of the great refineries of that country, that we are chiefly indebted for the recent success of our operations.

We have had no real sorrow in our family since the year I left school, except the death of my beloved grandfather. If he is no longer with us to fondle and cherish the little Besnards of the present generation as he did the little Besnard of the previous one, his memory still survives at our fireside, and I can say that the dear shade continues to occupy in our hearts the place that his virtues and kindly nature gained for him.

M. Pellerin, now a member of the Institute, has ever remained our faithful and devoted friend, and will, I trust, long preserve, for the benefit of my children, a store of those sage maxims, which proved so advantageous to Baudouin and me. In his hours of leisure he has always been my master and my teacher. "You have a pen," he said to me, "and I taught you how to use it; why let it rust in idleness?" Instigated by him, I wrote, under an assumed name, several articles on political economy for one of the great reviews, and by doing so, I was told, was the means of securing the passage of more than one progressive measure. It is a treat for M. Pellerin when I ask him to read my manuscripts, at the head of which I never fail to write in big schoolboy characters, as in the old lycée days, *Lege quæso*. My Aunt Aubert, too, reads them with fervid interest from beginning to end. She declares that in all her reading she finds nothing half so attractive. Poor Aunt Aubert!

M. Desbans has gained additional reputation, and relegated to the shadows of the past the sobriquet of Tronc-de-Cône by discovering several new principles in mathematics.

As for M. Aveline, he still remains professor of history at Montaigne, notwithstanding the successes gained almost yearly by his pupils at the *concours*. It is those very suc-

cesses that endear his position to him, and cause him to prefer it to the grander title of professor of the faculty.

Captain Biradent, young still in heart as in the suppleness of his corporeal frame, figures in the *Military Annual* as major in the territorial army.

Finally, my comrades of the Lycée Montaigne have met with varying fortunes, according as they have exhibited more or less wisdom in choosing their calling and stuck to it with more or less energy and determination.

Payan, after directing operations at the second tunneling of Mont Cenis, is now chief engineer of the trans-Saharan railway. Ségol is professor of the third rank in one of our provincial lycées. Dutheil, one of the most distinguished lawyers of the Lyons bar.

Chavasse, after he had literally devoured the small fortune left him by his parents, and made a failure of it in several queer callings, wound up by becoming manager of a table d'hôte of some celebrity in the Quartier Popincourt, over which he presides in person every evening. His convex paunch constitutes the establishment's best advertisement. He might have attained this glorious result, however, without wearing out the seats of dozens of pairs of trousers on the benches of the Lycée Montaigne.

Thomereau has remained constant to his vocation of propagating the pun. When I last heard from him he was conducting a small comic paper, the *Jolly Joker's Exchange* I fear it is an occupation in which he receives more kicks and cuffs than half-pence.

Molécule is vainly looking for a publisher for his complete poetical works, and while waiting for that *rara avis* to disclose himself, performs the duties of bookkeeper in one of the great dry goods shops. He smokes and snuffs

as assiduously as ever, and has not grown an inch, unless it be in his own estimation.

Verschuren is *chef d'escadron* in a huzzar regiment, and sports one of the most magnificent mustaches in the entire French army.

THE END.



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